

**Lay People in the Asian Church:  
A Critical Study of the Role of the Laity in the Contextual Theology of the  
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (1970-2001) with Special Reference to  
John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici* (1989) and *Ecclesia in  
Asia* (1999), and the Pastoral Letters of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference**

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## Statement of Sources

Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own original work, and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any academic award at this or any other tertiary educational institution.

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[http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt\\_10/hai.htm](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_10/hai.htm) (accessed 30 May 2007).

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## Thesis Abstract

This thesis investigates the theology of the laity as proposed by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) from 1970 to 2001, and situates it in the context of post-Vatican II magisterial documents, in particular Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici* (1989) and *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), and the pastoral letters of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (VEC). The thesis suggests that the FABC's theology of the laity follows a "see, judge, act" methodology, and is basically a faith seeking triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. It notes that there was both a fundamental continuity and a gradual development in this theology, which privileges the concepts of "priesthood of life" and contextualised communion, a common matrix that is linked to the notions of integral liberation and *tria munera*, to explicate the vocation and mission of lay people, defined first and foremost as Asian Christians. It suggests further that the FABC's theology of the laity was formulated in tandem with its ecclesiology, one that focuses on the kingdom of God, and was marked by an increased emphasis on the Church as communion-in-mission, as dialogue and solidarity, as disciple-community, and as a community of faith, hope, and charity, realised in basic ecclesial communities.

This thesis argues that the FABC's theology of the laity integrates the major themes of the theologies of the laity according to John Paul II and the Vietnamese bishops. It notes that baptismal identity and dignity of Christians lie at the heart of the theology of the laity in *Christifideles Laici*, and that it is the logic of faith as gift and evangelisation as task that underlines and unifies *Ecclesia in Asia*. It goes on to contend that witness of life is a comprehensive concept that the Pope employs in *Ecclesia in Asia* to describe and prescribe the identity and role of lay people in Asia, and that, despite two diverse dynamics and two different paths charted for the future of the Church in Asia, there was a substantial convergence between his views and the FABC's theology of the laity. The thesis also suggests that, by deepening the meaning and implications of the motif "Sống Phúc Âm giữa lòng dân tộc để phục vụ hạnh phúc của đồng bào" ["Living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of our compatriots"], the VEC's theology of the laity is uniquely contextual in the political and social situation of Vietnam. It further argues that, by emphasising

love and service as the concrete expressions of the Church's mission in Vietnam, this local theology has become more closely aligned with the thinking of both John Paul II and the bishops of Asia.

This thesis concludes that by maintaining both the contextual character and the universalising dimension, the FABC's contextual theology of the laity represents an integration of and a step beyond the theologies of the laity of John Paul II and the Vietnamese bishops. However, this theology could be expanded by, *inter alia*, an emphasis on the theme of *missio Dei*, an exploration of the model of the Church as a structured *communio*, a consideration of lay functions from the perspective of ordered ministries, a development of a baptism-centred theology of lay people, and finally, a review of the relevance and fitness for purpose of the term "triple dialogue."



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## Abbreviations

ABM	Asian Bishops' Meeting
ACMC	Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church
AMCU	Asian Movement for Christian Unity
AsIPA	Asian Integral Pastoral Approach
BIBA	Bishops' Institute for Biblical Apostolate
BILA	Bishops' Institute for Lay Apostolate
BIMA	Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate
BIRA	Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BISCOM	Bishops' Institute for Social Communication
BISA	Bishops' Institute for Social Action
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
FABC I	Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC II	Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC III	Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC IV	Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC V	Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC VI	Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC VII	Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FAPA Vol. 1	<i>For All the Peoples of Asia</i> , vol. 1
FAPA Vol. 2	<i>For All the Peoples of Asia</i> , vol. 2
FAPA Vol. 3	<i>For All the Peoples of Asia</i> , vol. 3
FIRA	Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs
OEIA	Office of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs
OESC	Office of Education & Student Chaplaincy
OE	Office of Evangelization
OHD	Office of Human Development
OL	Office of Laity
OSC	Office of Social Communication
OTC	Office of Theological Concerns
TAC	Theological Advisory Commission
VEC	Vietnamese Episcopal Conference

## Notes

### Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

All of the important documents of the FABC issued between 1970 and 2001 were published in the following three volumes:

Rosales, Gaudencio B. and C.G. Arevalo, eds. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991*. Vol. 1. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992.

Eilers, Franz-Josef, ed. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1992 to 1996*. Vol. 2. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997.

Eilers, Franz-Josef, ed. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1997 to 2001*. Vol. 3. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002.

### Vatican II

Quotations from the documents of the Second Vatican Council are based on the version for which Austin Flannery served as the general editor, *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), and *Vatican Council II: Vol. 2, More Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1998).

## **Vietnamese Episcopal Conference**

All of the important pastoral letters and communiqués in Vietnamese language of the Catholic bishops of Indochina and the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference, issued between 1951 and 2001, were published in two collections edited by Trần Anh Dũng, and in the 2004 and 2005 Almanacs of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, edited by the VEC's General Secretariat. The details are as follows:

Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference]. *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2004* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2004], edited by Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký, Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [General Secretariat, The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference]. Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], edited by Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký, Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [General Secretariat, The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference]. Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005.

Trần Anh Dũng, ed. *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Viet Nam]. Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)* [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference]. Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 2001.

## **Gender-inclusive Language**

I have made an effort to use gender-inclusive language throughout this thesis, but that has not been possible in quoting historical texts. I ask for the reader's indulgence.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: REDISCOVERING THE IMPORTANCE OF LAY PEOPLE IN THE ASIAN CHURCH

As one of the main preoccupations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the vocation and mission of the laity was the subject of an entire conciliar Decree and several sections of two Constitutions on the Church.<sup>1</sup> In the first Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*,<sup>2</sup> the Council emphasised the basic equality of all the baptised,<sup>3</sup> and the common priesthood of all the faithful in the Church as the people of God.<sup>4</sup> Thereby, it

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<sup>1</sup> See Vatican Council II, “*Apostolicam Actuositatem*: Degree on the Apostolate of the Laity,” in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new revised edition (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 766-98; “*Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” *ibid.* 350-426; “*Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” *ibid.*, 903-1001. Henceforth, in footnotes the full titles of these conciliar documents will be abbreviated to “*Lumen Gentium*,” “*Apostolicam Actuositatem*,” and “*Gaudium et Spes*,” followed by numbers. The main conciliar teachings on the laity appear in “*Lumen Gentium*,” especially chapter 2 on the people of God and chapter 4 on the laity, “*Apostolicam Actuositatem*,” and “*Gaudium et Spes*,” in particular section 43.

<sup>2</sup> Contending that one of the lasting contributions of the Council was its “Christological definition of the concept of the Church,” Joseph Ratzinger argues that “to understand Vatican II correctly one must always and repeatedly begin with” the first sentence of *Lumen Gentium*, which declares that “*Lumen gentium cum sit Christus*.” See *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (Middlegreen, Slough, England: St Paul Publications, 1988) 4-5. For Gerard Philips, “from the beginning, the Constitution on the Church explicitly adopts a Christocentric perspective, one which runs like a golden thread throughout the whole treatment” (“The Church: mystery and Sacrament,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, edited by John H. Miller [New York: Association Press, 1966] 187). Kenan B. Osborne also observes that “for a Christian the Jesus-event is central,” and “Jesus alone is *lumen gentium*” (*Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* [New York: Paulist Press, 1993] 602). Osborne goes on to assert that “Christology in an ever increasing way will be seen as the basis and substance of ecclesiology.” *Ibid.*, 603.

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.

<sup>4</sup> For Yves Congar, one of the most important decisions made by Vatican II was to place chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium* on the People of God between chapter 1 on the mystery of the Church and chapter 3 on the hierarchy, and that chapter 2 “has the greatest promise for the theological, pastoral and ecumenical future of ecclesiology” (“The People of God,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, edited by John H. Miller [New York: Association Press, 1966] 197). Thomas P. Rausch notes that “the council took a number of steps to develop a theology of the laity: First, it used the biblical image of the people of God to describe the Church...and emphasized that the whole Church...are called to holiness.... Pneumatologically, it reclaimed the *charismata* or spiritual gifts ‘both hierarchic and charismatic’.... Most important, it stressed that both ordained ministers and all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ, though in different ways” (“Ministry and Ministries,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003] 57). For a detailed commentary on the notion of the people God in *Lumen Gentium* see Aloys Grillmeier, “The People of God,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, vol.1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) 153-85. Avery Dulles reminds us that

provided the dogmatic foundation for the development of a practical theology of the laity in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.<sup>5</sup> At the heart of this Decree is a revolutionary claim that Christ himself calls every faithful to serve the mission of the Church.<sup>6</sup> In the second Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council highlighted the special responsibility of lay people in the modern world.<sup>7</sup>

With these teachings, Vatican II, following the twin strategy of *ressourcement* (returning to Christian sources in Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and philosophy) and *aggiornamento* (renewal or updating the Church), effectively renewed the hierarchical and institutionalised ecclesiology,<sup>8</sup> and signalled a shift in the Church's understanding of the identity and role of lay people.<sup>9</sup> First, it abandoned an attitude that was prevalent for centuries, which took for granted a passive role for the laity. Second, it advocated the active participation of lay people in the priestly,

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"in New Testament times there was, technically speaking, no such thing as the laity, or clergy either. There were diverse ministries, of course, but they were not put into these two categories" ("Can the Word 'Laity' Be Defined?" *Origins* 18:29 [29 December 1988] 470). Dulles' view echoes Congar's observation that "there is no distinction between 'lay people' and 'clerics' in the vocabulary of the New Testament." See Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, translated by Donald Attwater, revised ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 4.

<sup>5</sup> A.A. Hagstrom notes that Vatican II was "the first council to treat the laity from a theological, rather than an exclusively canonical, point of view." See "Theology of Laity," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 8 (Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 291.

<sup>6</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33. For Avery Dulles, "At the council the Catholic Church for the first time in history took up in its full scope the question of the status and role of the laity. If Vatican II had done nothing else, that fact alone would make the council historic" ("Can the Word 'Laity' Be Defined?" *Origins* 18:29 [29 December 1988] 471).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas P. Rausch argues that "perhaps the most significant shift represented by the council was the turn toward the world and especially toward the poor" (*Catholicism in the Third Millennium*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2003] 16).

<sup>8</sup> This ecclesiology, "which had lasted almost four centuries," was aptly described as "*hiérarchologie*," a term coined by Yves Congar in 1947 to characterise the Church presented as "an organized society constituted by the exercise of powers with which pope, bishops and priests were invested." See Yves Congar, *Ministère et Communion Ecclésiale* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1971) 10; "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 170; Thomas F. O'Meara, "Beyond 'Hierarchology'," in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by D.J. Dietrich and M.J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 183, 190.

<sup>9</sup> For Giovanni Magnani, the importance of the laity question at Vatican II can be seen in the fact that the term "layman" occurs 206 times in the conciliar documents, not counting the "three instances of 'laity' and seven of the adjective 'lay'." See "Does the So-Called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status?" in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, vol. 1, edited by René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 595.

prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ,<sup>10</sup> considering it as a duty incumbent on all recipients of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Vatican II has often been hailed as “the Council of the Laity.”<sup>12</sup> This Copernican revolution in the conciliar theology of the laity generated in turn a rediscovery of the importance of lay people in the Asian Churches,<sup>13</sup> which, like other Catholic ecclesial communities throughout the world, experienced Vatican II as a theological event and a catalyst for change.<sup>14</sup> One of the notable changes was the establishment of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC),<sup>15</sup> an ecclesial body that received its official

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<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33. It is instructive to recall Kenan B. Osborne’s insightful remark that the “integration of the sacrament of initiation (baptism–confirmation–eucharist) into the fundamental structure of church ministry is key to the understanding both of the church itself and of the various church ministries, which one finds throughout the Vatican II documents (*Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* [New York: Paulist Press, 1993] 1).

<sup>12</sup> Yves Congar, “The Laity,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, edited by John H. Miller (New York: Association Press, 1966) 239; John Nilson, “The Laity,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 400.

<sup>13</sup> In this thesis, we use interchangeably the following terms, in singular or plural form: “the Church in Asia,” or “the Asian Church.” Elsewhere in the text, we also employ the phrase “the Church of Asia.” By these terms we mean first and foremost, but not always in an exclusive sense, the Catholic Church in Asia. Theologically speaking, it would be more correct to speak of the “Church in Asia” rather than the “Asian Church” or “the Church of Asia.” Indeed, one only needs to recall the custom of Saint Paul, who believes strongly that the local Church is the incarnation of the Church of God, e.g., “to the Church of God in Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1), or “... the Church in Cenchrea” (Rom 16:1). Henri de Lubac notes that “Ignatius of Antioch likewise addressed himself to ‘the Church of God which is at Philadelphia of Asia’, at Magnesia, Tralles, Smyrna, etc. Origen used these formulas again. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* contains a similar, more explicit greeting: ‘The Church of God which resides at Smyrna, to the Church of God which resides at Philomelium and to all the residences everywhere of the holy and Catholic Church.’” See *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) 202-3.

<sup>14</sup> Continuing the debate of the so-called “*Annales*” school on the meaning of the term “event,” and the relationship between *longue durée* and *événement*, Joseph Komonchak explores the theme of “Vatican II as ‘Event’,” *Theology Digest* 46:4 (Winter 1999) 337-352, making a distinction between “event, experience, and final documents.” In his view, “‘Experience’ refers to contemporary intentions, motives, encounters, decisions, and actions during the Council; the ‘final documents’ are the product of that experience.” “Event” represents a different category, in the sense of a “noteworthy” occurrence, one that has consequences. He concurs with most of the literature on the subject that an “event” represents novelty, discontinuity, a “rupture,” a break from routine, causing surprise, disturbance, even trauma, and perhaps initiating a new routine, a new realm of the taken-for-granted.

<sup>15</sup> The FABC consists of the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences in South, Southeast, East and Central Asia, and comprises member conferences from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar, Pakistan, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan (ROC), Thailand, and Vietnam. The ecclesiastical jurisdictions of Hong Kong (SAR), Macao, Mongolia, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Kirgystan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Siberia (Russia) enjoy associate membership. This study covers the first Asian Bishops’ Meeting in 1970, and the seven of the eight Plenary Assemblies that have been held, mostly once every four years, between the inception of the FABC in 1970 and 2001, namely: “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia” (1974), “Prayer – The Life of

status in 1972,<sup>16</sup> two years after 180 “Asian bishops” met for the first time around Paul VI in Manila.<sup>17</sup> Another change lies in the fact that, in their efforts over thirty-one years—from the historic meeting in 1970—to apply the conciliar teaching in the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*, the bishops of Asia have developed their own local theologies, including a contextual theology of the laity, which is the topic of this thesis.

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the Church in Asia” (1978), “The Church as a Community of Faith in Asia” (1982), “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia” (1986), “The Emerging Challenges for the Church in Asia in the 1990’s: A Call to Respond” (1990), “Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life” (1995), and “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service” (2000). All of the important documents of the FABC issued between 1970 and 2001 were published in the following three volumes: *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1, edited by G.B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference, Documents from 1992 to 1996*, vol. 2, edited by Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1997 to 2001*, vol. 3, Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002). These volumes will be cited as *FAPA Vol. 1*, *FAPA Vol. 2*, and *FAPA Vol. 3*, with the seven FABC Plenary Assemblies being referred to as FABC I, II, III, IV, V, VI, and VII. FABC’s offices will be abbreviated as follows: Office of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), Office of Education & Student Chaplaincy (OESC), Office of Evangelization (OE), Office of Human Development (OHD), Office of Laity (OL), Office of Social Communication (OSC), and Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), later renamed as Office of Theological Concerns (OTC). FABC’s study institutes and seminars organised by the FABC offices will be referred to as Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU), Bishops’ Institute for Biblical Apostolate (BIBA), Bishops’ Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA), Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA), Bishops’ Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM), Bishops’ Institute for Social Action (BISA), and Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA). It is important to note that of all the official documents published by the FABC, the final statements of the Plenary Assemblies are obviously the most authoritative. However, the texts produced by the FABC’s offices and study institutes, which often refer to the statements of Plenary Assemblies, also strongly reflect the thinking of the Asian bishops. Therefore, in this thesis, we make no distinction between the two. Domenico Colombo made a similar remark earlier, arguing that “queste strutture di settore e i loro testi, ovviamente, non hanno l’autorità delle Assemblee e sono espressioni indirette della FABC.” See “A Servizio dei Popoli dell’Asia: Camminare sulle orme di Gesù in ascolto dello Spirito,” in *Documenti della Chiesa in Asia: Federazione delle Conferenze Episcopali Asiatiche 1970-1995*, edited by Domenico Colombo (Bologna: Editrice Missionaria Italiana, 1997) 14. Colombo went on to suggest that it is important to know these texts to better understand the FABC. *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1972 the Holy See approved the statutes of the FABC *ad experimentum* for two years, marking the official establishment of the Federation. See FABC, *Statutes of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences* (Hong Kong: General Secretariat of the FABC, 1995) 1. For a detailed discussion of the history, objectives, functions, structures, and activities of the FABC see Miguel Marcelo Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents (1970-1995)* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000) 5-18; Edmund Chia, “Thirty Years of FABC: History, Foundation, Context and Theology” *FABC Papers*, No. 106 (Hong Kong: FABC Central Secretariat, 2003) 4-13.

<sup>17</sup> FABC, “Asian Bishops’ Meeting,” arts. 1, 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 3; Felix Wilfred, “The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC),” in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1., edited by Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992) xxiii. In this study we employ the terms “the Asian bishops” and “the bishops of Asia” interchangeably to refer to the Catholic bishops of Episcopal Conferences in East Asia that are members of the FABC.



The theme of “the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia” was discussed in detail at the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC held in September 1986.<sup>18</sup> While accepting Vatican II teachings,<sup>19</sup> the Asian bishops were acutely aware that “the signs of the times” in their region pointed in directions different from what was assumed at the time of the Council.<sup>20</sup> They also realised that, after more than 400 years of active evangelisation, Christians still remain *a pusillus grex* in the vast continent of Asia.<sup>21</sup> This region is home to 60% of the world population,<sup>22</sup> most of which lives in abject poverty. It is also blessed with a plurality

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<sup>18</sup> FABC IV, *FAPA I, Vol. 1*, 177-98. Besides the Fourth Plenary Assembly, the Asian bishops have further explored the role of the laity in seminars organised by their Office of Laity and the Institute for the Lay Apostolate, and embarked on a programme of integral formation to promote “a New Way of Being Church in Asia.” *FAPA Vol II*, 107-11.

<sup>19</sup> Vatican II documents such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Nostra Aetate*, etc. have often been quoted in the statements of the FABC. John Paul II’s Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations such as *Redemptor Hominis*, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, and *Ecclesia in Asia* are also cited in the FABC documents, e.g., BIRA IV/3, art. 11.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 258; FABC VII, Part II.A, Part III.A.5, Part III.C.3, Conclusion.

<sup>20</sup> According to *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 4), “At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” T. Howland Sanks notes that “the phrase, ‘discerning the signs of the times’, had been used by Reinhold Niebuhr as a title for a book of his sermons in 1946, and the phrase was used frequently by Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. It means, according to Niebuhr, ‘to interpret historical events and values’ or, according to Vatican II, ‘to recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics’” (“Reading the Signs of the Times: Purpose and Method,” in *Reading the Signs of the Times: Resources for Social and Cultural Analysis*, edited by T. Howland Sanks and John A. Coleman [New York: Paulist Press, 1993] 3). Christopher O’Donnell notes that “the expression ‘signs of the times’ came into current usage about the time of Vatican II. Though appearing earlier in France, it was used by Pope John XXIII in the apostolic constitution *Humanae salutis* convoking Vatican II: ‘Making our own the warnings of Jesus exhorting us to discern ‘the signs of the times’ (Matt 16:3), we detect in the midst of so much darkness many indications that make us hopeful about the future of the Church and humanity’.” See *Ecclesia: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 424. For José Comblin, this phrase was understood by “John XXIII and the Council in two different senses which are not always clearly distinguished.... In the first place, the signs of the times indicated events and situations in contemporary Western society: that is, the changes taking place in society.... In the second place, there is a reference to Matthew 16:4, so to eschatological signs, signs of the presence of the kingdom of God in this world. The Council documents and the Pope’s speeches tended to conflate the two senses, as though the changes taking place in society had an eschatological meaning” (“The Signs of the Times,” *Concilium* 4 [2005] 73).

<sup>21</sup> Christians account for approximately 3.9% of the total population of Asia with Catholics representing about 2.8%, concentrated mainly in the Philippines (83% of the population), South Korea, Vietnam, and East Timor. See *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003) 638, 780, 801, 828, 857. In Vietnam, 4,944,084 (6.44%) out of the total population of 76,716,203 are Catholic compared to 8.27 % in 1963. See “Statistiques de l’Eglise catholique au Vietnam (Octobre 2001),” *Eglises d’Asie* 343 (16 December 2001) 31-5; “Les statistiques de catholicisme pour l’an 2000 font état d’un personnel d’Eglise en progression, mais d’un nombre de fidèles sans doute stationnaire,” *Eglises d’Asie* 322 (1 January 2001) 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> ACMC, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 69. Daniel G. Groody arrives at a similar figure: “if the 6.5 billion people who live on our planet were proportioned down to a community of 100 people, 60 would be

of ancient cultures and religious traditions that have shaped the “minds and hearts and lives” of Asian people down through a long history.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the Asian bishops had to reconsider the mission of the Church to such a world, and the role of the laity within it.

For the Asian bishops, the Church’s evangelising mission in Asia experiences the greatest urgency while at the same time needing to find a distinctive form.<sup>24</sup> This mission—“a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ”<sup>25</sup>—will mean a triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor.<sup>26</sup> This “dialogue of life,”<sup>27</sup> or “dialogue of salvation,”<sup>28</sup> is “intrinsic to the very life of the church, and the essential mode of all evangelisation.”<sup>29</sup> At their seventh Plenary Assembly held in January 2000, after years of addressing individual issues confronting the Asian Church, the bishops of Asia finally adopted an inclusive view of the evangelising mission,<sup>30</sup> a term now encompassing inculturation, dialogue, justice, and the option for the poor, not as separate topics but aspects of an integrated understanding of the Church’s mission of love and service.<sup>31</sup>

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Asian, 14 African, 11 European, 14 American (North, South, Central, and Caribbean), and 1 would be an Australian or New Zealander.” See “Globalizing Solidarity: Christian Anthropology and the Challenge of Human Liberation,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 253.

<sup>23</sup> FABC I, Briefer Statement of the Assembly, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> FABC V, art. 4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281.

<sup>25</sup> FABC V, art. 3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 280.

<sup>26</sup> For an in-depth treatment of the theme of triple dialogue, see Peter C. Phan’s classic trilogy: *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003); *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003); *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> FABC I, art. 20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 15; FABC VI, art. 8.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288.

<sup>28</sup> BIMA I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 94.

<sup>29</sup> BIRA I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 111.

<sup>30</sup> The Asian bishops refer to this as a “movement toward active integral evangelization, toward a new sense of mission.” FABC VII, Part I.A.5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> FABC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

## 1.1 The Significance of this Study

To fulfil the evangelising mission in Asia, the Asian bishops have turned to the lay faithful. They conceded that the lay apostolate still remained basically “parish-oriented, inward-looking and priest-directed.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, they have deepened their theology of the laity and used it as a foundation to develop a lay ministry more oriented to the world. This theology, deeply anchored in a contextual ecclesiology that was developed at the Third Plenary Assembly held in 1982, interprets anew the identity, vocation, and role of lay people, and places emphasis on their co-responsibility in the mission of the Church, in collaboration with bishops, priests, and religious.

For the bishops of Asia, the success of the evangelising mission in Asia will very much depend on how vigorously lay people, agents of evangelisation *par excellence*, have come to understand and implement their dual responsibility in the Church and in the world.<sup>33</sup> Yves Congar, often considered to be the most important Catholic ecclesologist of the twentieth century,<sup>34</sup> underscores this point by predicting that “if the Church, secure on her foundations, boldly throws herself open to lay activity, she will experience such a spring time as we cannot imagine.”<sup>35</sup>

Yet, so far, despite its prominence in the FABC’s thought, and its enormous implications for the mission and the future of the Asian Church, the role of the laity in the documents of the FABC has been examined mainly in isolation or only as related to other concerns. By focusing on one aspect of the question of the laity, studies conducted so far have not treated the FABC’s theology of the laity in a full and critical fashion. Therefore, to remedy this gap in research, we intend to investigate the

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<sup>32</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>33</sup> FABC V, arts. 3.3.3., 5.1, 8.1.1-8.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281, 283, 287.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas F. O’Meara, “Beyond ‘Hierarchology,’” in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by D.J. Dietrich and M.J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 173; Elizabeth T. Groppe, “The Practice of Theology as Passion for Truth: Testimony from the Journals of Yves Congar, O.P.,” *Horizons* 31:2 (Fall 2004) 384.

<sup>35</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, rev. ed., trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) xviii.

FABC's theology of the laity in a more comprehensive fashion by discussing its historical context, its methodologies, its contents and development, and its ecclesiological underpinnings. To bring out the richness and dynamics of the FABC's contextual theology of the laity, we will also compare it with the theologies developed by John Paul II and the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference.

This thesis, then, will investigate the theology of the laity as proposed by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (1970-2001). It will situate this theology in the context of post-Vatican II magisterial documents, in particular Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici* and *Ecclesia in Asia*,<sup>36</sup> and the pastoral letters of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference. The thesis will ascertain whether there has been a development in the FABC's theology of the laity, and to what extent this teaching represents an integration of, and a step beyond, other postconciliar theologies of the laity.

## 1.2 The State of the Question

To date, the documents of the FABC have been the object of over twenty doctoral dissertations and a couple of licentiate or masters theses.<sup>37</sup> They treat a variety of theological themes such as the evangelising mission,<sup>38</sup> the kingdom of God,<sup>39</sup> ecclesiology,<sup>40</sup> Christology,<sup>41</sup> inculturation,<sup>42</sup> and liberation.<sup>43</sup> Besides a doctoral

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<sup>36</sup> See John Paul II, "*Christifideles Laici*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World," *Origins* 18:35 (9 February 1989) 561, 563-595. Henceforth, in footnotes, the full title will be abbreviated to *Christifideles Laici* followed by cited numbers. John Paul II, "*Ecclesia in Asia*," *Origins* 29:23 (18 November 1999) 357, 359-84. Hereafter, only the title *Ecclesia in Asia* and relevant numbers will be cited in footnotes.

<sup>37</sup> For a latest count of these doctoral theses, see <http://www.fabc.org/FABCRelatedStudies.html> (accessed 30 October 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Agustinus Bula, "A Study of the Evangelization Mission of the Church in Contemporary Asia in the Light of the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1970-1995" (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Urbana, 1997); Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan, "*Missio ad Gentes* in Asia: a Comparative Study of the Missiology of John Paul II and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Miguel Marcelo Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents (1970-1995)* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> C.B. Putranta, "The Idea of the Church in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970-1982" (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1985); James Thoppil, "Towards an Asian Ecclesiology: Understanding of the Church in the Documents of the

thesis that discusses the spirituality of lay people in a local Church with reference to the FABC statements,<sup>44</sup> three of the doctoral studies deal with the mission and ministry of the laity.<sup>45</sup>

Marta Nam Ki Ok and Petrus Maria Handoko discuss the evangelising role of the lay faithful and lay ministries respectively, using the FABC documents published up to 1991 including the statements of the first five Plenary Assemblies of the FABC (1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, and 1990).<sup>46</sup> Nam Ki Ok's study focuses on the mission of the laity in the social and religious context of Korea, devoting only one of the work's eight chapters to examine the statements of the FABC that deal with the role of lay people. The author's approach to the subject in this chapter is predominantly pastoral, emphasising the importance of the formation for the laity,<sup>47</sup> and containing numerous

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Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970-1995 and the Asian Ecclesiological Trends" (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> A. Alangaram, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology Based on the Documents of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences*, rev. ed. (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> 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 FABC" (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> D. Bosco M. Mariampillai, "The Emerging Asian Theology of Liberation in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences 1974-1986" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ottawa, 1993).

<sup>44</sup> Sinani Anatriello, "Spirituality for the Laity in the Tounghu Diocese in the Light of the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)" (S.T.D. diss., International Carmelite College (Teresianum), Pontifical Faculty of Theology, Pontifical Institute of Spirituality, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Petrus Maria Handoko, "Lay Ministries in the Mission and Ministry of the Church in Asia: A Critical Study of the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1970-1991" (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1993); Marta Nam Ki Ok, "Il ruolo evangelizzatore dei fedeli laici nel contesto socio-religioso in Corea alla luce dei documenti della FABC dal 1980 al 1991" (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1996); Nguyen Van Am, "The Laity in Asia: Mission as Inculturation in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences" (S.T.D. diss., Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> This thesis will examine the statements of two more plenary assemblies: the theme of FABC VI (1995) was "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," and the topic of FABC VII (2000) concerned "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service." During this period, the institutes and offices of the FABC also published several documents, e.g., "Role of Women in Church and Society," "Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church," "The Youth of Asia Envisioning the Fullness of Life and Human Dignity in the Church," "The Commitment of the Laity in the Church's Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings," "The Role of the Laity in Church Mission in South East Asia with Special Emphasis on Implementing the Church's Social Teachings," and "The Role of the Laity in Human Development."

<sup>47</sup> Marta Nam Ki Ok, *ibid.*, 120-32.

references to the social and ecclesial situations in Korea.<sup>48</sup> Her analysis of the texts consists of a number of direct quotations taken mainly from the statements of the FABC's Fourth Plenary Assembly on the laity and the Bishops' Institutes for the Lay Apostolate, often sandwiched between general introductory and summary remarks, and arranged under the headings of the role of the laity in the family, in the field of education, in the world of work, and in the local Church of East Asia.<sup>49</sup>

Handoko's thesis provides a more extensive investigation of the FABC's theology of lay ministries in the light of the "paradigm of Kingdom."<sup>50</sup> He situates his treatment of lay ministries "within what is termed a total ecclesiology,"<sup>51</sup> and considers "communion as a mode of mission."<sup>52</sup> However, the author does not discuss the contextual approach of the FABC's theology of the laity, and its emphasis on the triple dialogue as the mode of the evangelising mission in Asia.<sup>53</sup> His study could be complemented by a discussion of the theological methodologies employed by the bishops of Asia including the "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach."<sup>54</sup> It could also be strengthened by an examination of the common priesthood of the faithful as "a real priesthood of life" and the basis for lay identity and secularity,<sup>55</sup> an investigation of the ecclesial construct of basic ecclesial communities,<sup>56</sup> and an exploration of the

<sup>48</sup> See for instance, Marta Nam Ki Ok, *ibid.*, 132-3, 138-9, 141, 144-5, 148, 150-1.

<sup>49</sup> Marta Nam Ki Ok, *ibid.*, 132-68.

<sup>50</sup> Handoko, "Lay Ministries in the Mission and Ministry of the Church in Asia," 4. Quatra's thesis provides a much more exhaustive investigation of the theme "Kingdom of God."

<sup>51</sup> Handoko, "Lay Ministries in the Mission and Ministry of the Church in Asia," 4. This approach was likely inspired by Yves Congar's observation that "there can only be one sound and sufficient theology of the laity, and that is a 'total ecclesiology'." See Congar's *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, revised edition, with additions by the author, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) xvi-xvii.

<sup>52</sup> Handoko, "Lay Ministries in the Mission and Ministry of the Church in Asia," 287.

<sup>53</sup> OTC, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology," *FABC Vol. 3*, 329-419; FABC I, arts. 14-20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14-15; BIMA I, art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 94; BIRA I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 111.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*; Office of Laity, "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach: Towards a New Way of being Church in Asia," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 107-11; "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA): Message to the Churches of Asia," *FAPA, Vol. 2*, 137-9; "Second Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) General Assembly II: Final Statement," *FAPA Vol. 3*, 107-12.

<sup>55</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>56</sup> FABC VII, Part III, C.7; *FAPA Vol. 1*, 76-7; *FAPA Vol. 3*, 15.

linkage between the mission of the laity and the orientation of the FABC's triple dialogue, namely, inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation or human development. In this way, the richness of the FABC's theology of the laity could better be revealed, and shown to be more encompassing, relevant, and useful to Asian Christians.

Nguyen Van Am's dissertation is the third and latest study on the mission of lay people in Asia, based on the documents of the Asian bishops issued up to 2001. The author investigates the subject under three aspects, in three successive chapters.<sup>57</sup> Chapter 2 "deals with inculturation in a close relationship to the laity."<sup>58</sup> In Chapter 3, which purportedly "points out an Asian lay spirituality implied in the mission of inculturation,"<sup>59</sup> Nguyen Van Am argues that "this is the way in which lay people in Asia develop their lay identity by listening to the Spirit and by working for the Kingdom with the heart detached from wealth and power."<sup>60</sup> Finally, in Chapter 4, which "singles out some emphases in the Asian Synod,"<sup>61</sup> he suggests that "through these emphases, the Synod encourages lay people to involve in the mission of inculturation."<sup>62</sup> Throughout his study, there is an inattentiveness to the dynamic integration between inculturation and the other two pillars of the FABC's threefold dialogical approach, namely the dialogue with other religions and the engagement with the poor.<sup>63</sup> His treatment of the spirituality of the Asian laity could be enriched

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<sup>57</sup> The first chapter of Nguyen Van Am's dissertation "gives a brief overview of the history of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences," and the last chapter, Chapter 5, is an attempt "to construct a theological synthesis based on the documents analyzed in preceding chapters." See "The Laity in Asia: Mission as Inculturation in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," vii-viii.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the Synod for Asia and its themes, see *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Recalling the FABC's emphasis on "the necessity of doing these three dialogues together," Peter C. Phan states that "inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation form the three-pronged approach to Christian mission in Asia" ("Cultures, Religions, and Power: Proclaiming Christ in the United States Today," *Theological Studies* 65 [2004] 735); see also *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003) 188-9; FABC I, Briefer Statement

by an exploration of the FABC's teaching on the spirituality of discipleship and the spirituality of harmony. His discussion on the emphases of the Asian Synod and their impact on the mission of lay people in Asia, could also be broadened by an elaboration on the concept of witness of life, a leitmotif of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, a discussion of the identity, vocation, and mission of lay people in the context of the Church as a witnessing community of faith built on the two pillars of communion and mission, and some remarks on the continuing debate on the primacy between proclamation and triple dialogue. In general, Nguyen Van Am's examination of the thesis topic tends to be cursory, and some of the sweeping statements that his study contains will not likely go unchallenged. For instance, in the introduction to his dissertation, the author avers that "it is true that Asian lay people are very devout and zealous. The FABC knows this. Consequently, the Asian bishops charge the laity with a challenging mission, the mission of inculturation."<sup>64</sup> In the final conclusion, he summarises his study in four assertions, the last of which reads: "more than ever before, the laity in Asia acknowledges that there is no opposition between being Christian and being Asian. More strongly speaking, Asian Christians are called to bring to light this truth that to be Christian is the best way of being Asian."<sup>65</sup> These assertions do not seem to have clear warrants from the texts of the Asian bishops.

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of the Assembly, art. 20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 23. Elsewhere, Phan notes that, for the FABC, these three essential tasks "are not three distinct and separate activities of the church; rather, they are three intertwined dimensions of the church's one mission of evangelization" (*In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003] 19; see also FABC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Nguyen Van Am, "The Laity in Asia: Mission as Inculturation in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," v.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 185. Also cited here are the main points of the remaining assertions in the conclusion of Nguyen Van Am's thesis: "The century of the laity in Asia has come. The FABC aims at consolidating this *kairos* by entrusting without hesitation the great and challenging mission of inculturation to Asian lay people. More precisely, it is not the church, but Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit who commissions them through Baptism for the sake of Asians. For this reason, first, for lay people to live must mean to live in Jesus Christ (cf. Phil. 1:21), God-made-man, who should illumine and inspire the incarnational lifestyle of lay Christians in Asia.... **Second**, Spirit-filled lay people should give praise to God for his love endures forever.... The laity in Asia emerges as a sign of the totally new order of history, which is not only above, but also within this history, which is already present, but not fully manifested. Thus, to fulfil the mission of inculturation the laity should walk the earth under the Spirit's lead, the Spirit of Joy, *laetitia*. Therefore, **third**, Asian lay people gradually learn to contemplate *sacrament*-church to better understand their lay identity. Of course, they live in the *sacramental* economy, celebrating the sacraments, not as a mere ritualism, but as the source of life.... This sacramental dynamism defines the lay identity as a longing for God's love amidst its specific secularity in Asian realities..." (bold typeface in the original). Ibid., 184-5.



In sum, given the focus, depth, and limited coverage of the aforementioned studies, the role of the laity in the documents of the FABC still remains a topic that merits further systematic investigation. We also note the paucity of the secondary literature on the role of lay people in the documents of the FABC, which comprise a few articles, two of which produced as position papers in preparation for the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,<sup>66</sup> and several workshop guides.<sup>67</sup> These authors could not deal with the theme in an exhaustive fashion because of the limitations of the genre.

With respect to the vocation and mission of the laity in John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, to date, there has not been any scholarly research devoted in a substantial way to the subject. There has also been no systematic study on the mission of the laity as proposed in the pastoral letters of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (VEC),<sup>68</sup> except perhaps Ha Van Minh's doctoral thesis, which aims to examine the role of lay people in the context of Vietnam.<sup>69</sup> This work begins with a detailed account of the place and mission of lay people in the history of the Church in Vietnam from 1533 to 1975,<sup>70</sup> drawing mainly from Vietnamese sources. It

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<sup>66</sup> S.J. Emmanuel, "Contemporary Catholic Thought on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World," *FABC Papers*, No. 44 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1986); Felix Wilfred, "Sunset in the East: The Asian Realities Challenging the Church and Its Laity Today," *FABC Papers*, No. 45 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1986); Felipe Gómez, "The FABC and Youth," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 1 (1985) 88-92; [Editor], "Asian Voices in the Synod," and "The Propositions," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 1(1988) 10-28; 29-52.

<sup>67</sup> Twelve FABC Papers from no. 46a to no. 46l (Hong Kong: FABC, 1986).

<sup>68</sup> Pastoral letters and communiqués in Vietnamese language of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (henceforth abbreviated to VEC), issued between 1951 and 2000, are contained in two collections edited by Trần Anh Dũng, *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church of Viet Nam (1960-1995)] (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 1996), and *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)* [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (1980-2000)] (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 2001). Several of these documents were translated into English and published either on the Union of Catholic Asia News (UCAN) website <http://www.ucanews.com>, or in the magazine *Catholic International*. Others were professionally rendered into French by *Eglises d'Asie*, a monthly published by the Missions Étrangères de Paris, accessible from <http://eglasiemepasie.org>. Unless otherwise stated, translations of other documents from Vietnamese and French are mine throughout. Footnotes are made to the original texts in Vietnamese or in French in preference to the English translations some of which leave a lot to be desired. Hereafter, a pastoral letter cited will be abbreviated as "VEC's Pastoral Letter" followed by the year of publication and relevant page numbers.

<sup>69</sup> Ha Van Minh, *Die Laien in der Kirche Vietnams: Eine pastoraltheologische Studie zu ihrer Rolle in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-97.

then provides an exposition rather than a critique of the mission of the laity in the pastoral letters of the VEC,<sup>71</sup> the documents of Vatican II, the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Christifideles Laici*, and finally, the statements of the FABC, covering only the first five plenary assemblies, and the reports of the Asian Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate.<sup>72</sup> Consistent with his predominantly pastoral approach, the author devotes the last part of his work to discuss the cooperation of lay people in the Church in Vietnam and their active participation in the parish.<sup>73</sup> While his thesis contains quotations from several pastoral letters of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference, issued between 1976 and 1999, it includes, unfortunately, only one reference to the 1980 Pastoral Letter, a watershed document in the history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. Despite the current paucity of scholarly research on the role of the laity in the Church in Vietnam, numerous articles dealing with the Vietnamese laity, mostly of a popular nature and mainly in the Vietnamese language, have appeared in periodicals published by authors inside Vietnam or in the émigré communities.<sup>74</sup>

### 1.3 Scope and Methodology

With a view to complementing the existing studies on the role of lay people in the documents of the FABC, this thesis aims to offer a systematic exposition and a critical evaluation of the FABC's theology of the laity. The work is divided into three parts.

The first part aims to scope and place the subject of the study in context, and this will be done in the first three chapters. In Chapter 1, we highlight the effort of the FABC to rediscover the dignity and status of the laity in the Asian Church. We will also

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 103. We will provide a more detailed critique of this thesis in Chapter 9 when we examine the role of the laity in the pastoral letters of the VEC.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 98-220.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 221-320.

<sup>74</sup> Peter C. Phan notes that "Vietnamese Catholics are deeply concerned with preserving their language, culture, and religious traditions. To achieve this goal they publish numerous newspapers, magazines, and journals, among which the most important are *Dan Chua* (People of God), *Duc Me Hang Cuu Giup* (Our Lady of Perpetual Help), *Thoi Diem Cong Giao* (Catholic Periodical), and *Hop Tuyen Than Hoc* (Theological Selections)" ("Vietnamese Catholics in the United States: Christian Identity Between the Old and the New," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 18:1 [2000] 21-2).

review the state of the question, and explain the methodology and the importance of this research. In Chapter 2, we offer a chronological survey of the question of the laity, leading up to the particular contributions of postconciliar interpretations. In Chapter 3, we explore the theological methodologies of the FABC, and their influence on the formulation of the documents considered.

In the second part, which comprises four chapters, we provide a systematic exposition (Chapter 4) and a critical evaluation (Chapter 5) of the FABC's theology of the laity. This investigation is conducted against the backdrop of the FABC's contextual ecclesiology, which is presented and analysed in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

In the third and concluding part of this study, which consists of three chapters, we employ a critical and comparative methodology to articulate the FABC's theological positions, their relation to the teachings of Vatican II, John Paul II, and the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference. Chapter 8, then, treats the FABC's theology of the laity in the context of post-Vatican II magisterial documents, in particular John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici* (1989) and *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999). In Chapter 9, we situate the FABC's theology in the context of a local Church in Asia by examining in detail the theology of the laity proposed in the pastoral letters of the Vietnamese bishops. Here, we also explicate the interaction between the FABC's theology of the laity and those of John Paul II and the bishops of Vietnam. The course of the development of these three theologies of the laity took place on three ecclesial levels, namely, the regional level of the FABC, the global level of the universal magisterium of John Paul II, and the local level of the Vietnamese Church. In Chapter 10, the final chapter, we provide a general assessment of the FABC's theology of the laity in order to highlight its strengths, and respectfully offer suggestions for further clarification and development. We will also reflect on the future of the FABC's theology of the laity.

## 1.4 Contributions of this Study

Given that the concerns of the FABC, John Paul II, and the VEC are primarily missionary and pastoral,<sup>75</sup> we will probe beneath their official statements to detect the underlying theological foundations. We will also provide a critical and systematic exposition of their theologies of the laity. In embarking on such a journey of research, we hope to make the following contributions:

First, we hope that our critical examination of the content and development of the FABC's theology of the laity from 1970 to 2001, set against a historical survey of the question of the laity and lay ministry, would serve the intention of the Asian bishops, and be a resource for the implementation of their vision.

Second, by offering a comprehensive summary and evaluation of the FABC's thought on the Church, which in turn provides the theological grounding for its theology of the laity, we hope to furnish Asian Christians with a truthful account of the thrust and key ideas contained in the documents of the Asian bishops. It is worth noting that, like Vatican II, which was largely a Council *of* the Church, *for* the Church, and *about* the Church, the statements of the FABC are also, in the main, the documents *of* the Church in Asia *for* and *about* the Church in the vast continent of Asia.

Third, we will be filling a research gap by uncovering and explaining the theological methodologies of the Asian bishops. This will in turn underscore the special features of their contextual theology of the laity.

Fourth, by comparing the thoughts of John Paul II and the FABC on the identity and role of the laity we will be making a further contribution, as we analyse the interaction

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<sup>75</sup> Following Raymond E. Brown, we understand "missionary" as "adding constantly to the number of those who had come to believe in Jesus Christ," and "pastoral" as being "concerned with tending the existing flock." See *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) 32. We also take note of the explication of the term "pastoral" in an explanatory footnote of *Gaudium et Spes*, which states that this Constitution is called "pastoral" because, "while resting on doctrinal principles, it seeks to set forth the relation of the Church to the world and to the men [*sic*] of today." See Vatican Council II, "*Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. edition (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 903.

and mutual influence between the universal Church and the regional Churches in Asia, and the theologies that animate them.

Fifth, our study will make an even more specific contribution by examining the emerging theology of the laity in the context of Vietnam, and thus aid further communication between the universal Church and local Catholic communities.

Sixth, our contribution is necessarily a tentative enterprise, as we reflect on the future of the FABC's theology of the laity, and gaze beyond the immediate horizon of the post-Vatican II era, and into the third millennium of Christianity.

Finally, writing this thesis with Asian Christians, in particular the laity, as the main intended audience, our modest wish is that it would become, not just a theological work to be read from beginning to end, but also as a reference tool to be consulted as pastoral needs arise. We hope to achieve this objective—which is also the originality of this thesis—first, by selecting and organising relevant material from the vast corpus of literature produced by the FABC, John Paul II, the VEC, and Vatican II; second, by offering analyses and summaries of the main tenets of these teachings, often in the format of tables and diagrams for easy reference and teaching purposes; third, by drawing on the insights of numerous theologians of note and providing a wealth of bibliographic references. Our final hope is that our research labours would help the readers to expand their understanding of the FABC's theology of the laity, and hence the dignity, vocation, and mission of lay people in the Church and in the world of Asia.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LAITY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

#### 2.1 Introduction

Since Vatican II, a Council that was concerned primarily with the nature and mission of the Church, ecclesiology has assumed a central position in Catholic theology, and the laity question has also come into focus in a new way in theological reflection.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in the wake of this Council lay activities have flourished, and efforts have been made in different parts of the world to apply and extend the Council's teachings on the role of lay people in complex and varied situations. This thesis argues that the FABC's theology of the laity has likewise grown from an interchange between a *ressourcement* in the tradition it has inherited and a dialogue with the contemporary. It seeks to apply conciliar and papal teachings in the Asian context while drawing on the insights of other interpretations of lay experience. Therefore a critical survey of the historical development of the laity question in the Church, including a review of Vatican II's theology of the laity, would help in the examination of the FABC's teaching on "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World of Asia."<sup>2</sup> This chapter will first provide a historical overview of the status of lay people prior to Vatican II. Secondly, it will briefly summarise the main conciliar teachings on the laity and lay ministry. Thirdly, it will focus on postconciliar theologies of the laity, highlighting Yves Congar's reflection on lay ministries and Leonard Doohan's analysis of the trends of theological approaches to the question of lay people. This chapter will conclude with a review of the changing meaning of ministry and lay ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> Avery Dulles remarks that "the status and role of the laity have been at the forefront of discussion in the Catholic Church since Vatican Council II" ("Can the Word 'Laity' Be Defined?" *Origins* 18:29 [29 December 1988] 470).

<sup>2</sup> FABC IV, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 177-98.

## 2.2 The Laity Before Vatican Council II (1962-1965)

The terms “lay” or “laity” are derived indirectly from the Greek word *laos*,<sup>3</sup> meaning “people,” and early Christian writings often used *laos theou* “people of God” to refer to the community of the Church.<sup>4</sup> Originally it had a positive meaning with the New Testament nuance of election and consecration, and was often complemented by references such as “the chosen,” “the predestined,” “disciples,” or “the saints.”<sup>5</sup> Clement of Rome (c. 95), in his Letter to the Corinthians, was the first to employ the Greek word *laikós*, from which “laity” is more immediately derived, to describe the common, ordinary people in contrast to the officials.<sup>6</sup> This negative usage of the term was subsequently fuelled by three movements in the early Christian community: the

<sup>3</sup> Peter Neuner argues that the concept of laity does not come directly from the term *laos* but from the adjective *laikós* which means belonging to the people (“zum Volk gehörig”). See “Aspekte einer Theologie des Laien,” *Una Sancta* 43 (1988) 317.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Niermann, “Laity,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by Karl Rahner (London: Burns and Oates, 1975) 814-5; Leonard Doohan, “Theology of the Laity,” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig (Newtown, Australia: E.J. Dwyer, 1994) 493; idem, “Theology of the Laity,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, edited by Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990) 636.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Kasper, “The Mission of the Laity,” *Theology Digest* 35:2 (Summer 1998) 133; A.A. Hagstrom, “Theology of Laity,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 8 (Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 290; see also Bernard Sesboué, *N’ayez pas peur: regards sur l’Eglise et les ministères aujourd’hui* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996) 119. Tertullian (circa 160-223), apologist and Father of Latin theology, went much further to state that “là où il y a trois fidèles, il y a une Église, même si ce sont de laïcs.” Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See “The Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, Commonly Called Clement’s First Letter” in *Early Christian Fathers*, trans. and ed. Cyril C. Richardson et al. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1970) 62; Thomas Halton, *The Church*, Message of the Fathers of the Church, ed. Thomas Halton, no. 4 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1985) 137; Alexandre Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, trans. David Smith (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) 21. I. de la Potterie proved that *laikos* was not a biblical term and it had a special meaning: “le ‘peuple’ inférieur, en tant que se distinguant de ses chefs.” See “L’origine et le sens primitif du mot ‘laïc’,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 80 (1958) 840-1. For an excellent summary of this instructive paper see Friedrich Wulf, “Über die Herkunft und ursprünglichen Sinn des Wortes ‘Laie’,” *Geist und Leben* 32 (1959) 61-3. For an enlightening account of the debate on the origin of the term *laikos*, and the usage of the term *laos*, see Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 18-25. Phan Đình Cho [Peter C. Phan’s name in Vietnamese] observes that “clearly, for Clement, the laity (though he does not use the noun) form a distinct group of people in the church” (“The Laity in the Early Church: Building Blocks for a Theology of the Laity,” *Triết Đạo: Journal of Vietnamese Philosophy & Religion* 4:2 [2002] 40). According to Paul Lakeland the word *laikos* “is not found anywhere in the Bible,” but “*Laos* ... is frequently found in the Bible” (*The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church* [New York: Continuum, 2002] 11). Yves Congar concludes that “there is no distinction between ‘lay people’ and ‘clerics’ in the vocabulary of the New Testament.” See *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, revised edition, with additions by the author, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 4.

“neo-platonism’s influence on several Church Fathers, the growth of monasticism and the development of the clerical dimension of the Church.”<sup>7</sup> By the second century, when the Church emerged with a more clearly defined and organised hierarchical structure the laity began to be regarded as inferior to the clergy.<sup>8</sup> From the fourth century when Church structures were similar to political ones, “the subordination of laity became a firm part of Church life.”<sup>9</sup> With the passing of the period of persecutions, early Christians continued to witness to their faith, no longer as martyrs but as hermits, whose monastic lifestyle became “the model of holiness.”<sup>10</sup> The laity, already considered secondary to the hierarchy, was now depicted as “having chosen the less perfect way”<sup>11</sup> than the monks, and hence was relegated to the third place, after the clergy and the religious.<sup>12</sup> The inferiority and passivity of the laity continued

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<sup>7</sup> These three developments gave the “laity the image of second-class citizens because of their involvement with the material world which was thought to make them profane, the equation of holiness with monasticism thus introducing a minimalist approach to lay spirituality, and the introduction of grading or ranking of Church membership that left the laity subordinated and powerless.” See Leonard Doohan, “Theology of the Laity,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990) 636; “Lay People and the Church,” *The Way* (July 1992) 169. For Jon Nilson, “Monasticism greatly fostered the sense of a class structure in the Church. Monks were regarded as ‘super Christians’, wholly devoted to Christ by their poverty and celibacy.... The role of the ordinary Christian was to support those who served them by contemplation and prayer, that is, to monks and those who presided over them, the ordained.” See “The Laity,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 397.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Doohan, “Theology of the Laity,” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig (Newtown, Australia: E.J. Dwyer, 1994) 493. Peter C. Phan notes that “by the middle of the third century, the *difference* between the laity and the clergy gradually becomes the *inferiority* of the former to the latter” (“The Laity in the Early Church: Building Blocks for a Theology of the Laity,” *Triết Đạo: Journal of Vietnamese Philosophy & Religion* 4:2 [Fall 2002] 43); see also Alexandre Faivre, “Naissance d’un laïc chrétien: les enjeux d’un mot,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986) 428.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Doohan, “Theology of the Laity,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990) 636; “Lay People and the Church,” *The Way* (July 1992) 169; Alexandre Faivre, on the contrary, argues that, except for Clement’s use of the term “lay” for the first time toward the end of the first century, “The laity appeared for the first time in Christian history at the end of the second century or the beginning of the third.” For him, at that time they did not represent all Christian people but comprised only the “baptized believers of the male sex, the ‘husband of only one woman’,” and “it was not until the fourth century that the term ‘lay’ was also applied explicitly to women. From then on, the lay people represented all Christians who were not members of the clergy” (*The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, translated by David Smith [New York: Paulist Press, 1990] 209).

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Doohan, “Theology of the Laity,” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig (Newtown, Australia: E.J. Dwyer, 1994) 493.

<sup>11</sup> Avery Dulles, “Can the Word ‘Laity’ be Defined?” *Origins* 18:29 (29 December 1988) 470.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Doohan, “Theology of the Laity,” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig (Newtown, Australia: E.J. Dwyer, 1994) 493.



in subsequent centuries,<sup>13</sup> crystallised by Gratianus de Clusio's influential statement, "*Duo sunt genera Christianorum*,"<sup>14</sup> and eventually the Council of Trent (1545-1563) "legitimized the separation between clergy and people."<sup>15</sup> The laity's loss of status and dignity lasted until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3 The Laity and Lay Ministries in the Documents of Vatican II

At Vatican II, by placing the second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* on the People of God after the first chapter on the mystery of the Church, but before the chapters on the hierarchy, the laity, and the religious, the Council Fathers formally initiated a change in the Church's understanding of the vocation and the mission of lay people. At the beginning of chapter 4 of *Lumen Gentium* on the laity (no. 30), the Council categorically emphasised the equality of all members of the Church by declaring that "everything that has been said of the people of God is addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy."<sup>17</sup> This fundamental equality,<sup>18</sup> which precedes any

<sup>13</sup> J. Gilchrist, "Laity in the Middle Ages," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 8 (Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 293.

<sup>14</sup> See "Decretum Gratiani, Concordia Discordantium Canonum, Decreti Pars Secunda, Causa XII, Quaestio I, C. VII," extracted from *Patrologia Latina Database* published by Chadwyck-Healey Inc., Disk 5 [2003].

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Doohan, "Lay People and the Church," *The Way* (July 1992) 169. In his 1906 Encyclical Letter "*Vehementer*" Pope Pius X taught that "the Church is essentially an *unequal* society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful ... ; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors" (*The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, ed. Claudia Carlen [Raleigh, [N.C.]: McGrath Publishing, 1981] 47-8). The 1917 Code of Canon Law held that "by divine institution clergy are distinct from laity in the Church." Cited by Kenan Osborne in *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 41-2.

<sup>16</sup> In the years immediately prior to Vatican II, several theologians such as Yves M.J. Congar endeavoured to redefine the role of the laity. He associated the Christian usage of *laikos* with the Old Testament concept of *laos*, contending that the word 'lay' "properly meant the sacred people in opposition to the peoples who were not consecrated ...." See *Lay People in the Church*, rev. ed., trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 3. Congar also used the distinction between the structure and the life of the church to enhance the status of the laity, arguing that the clergy belongs to the structure of the Church, while the laity pertains to the life of the Church, which is more central. See *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, revised edition, with additions by the author, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 262.

<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Magnani argues that "all the general indications given by the conciliar text as it stands when it makes statements concerning the laity, seem more or less to prepare the way for a status of identity between the 'Christian' and the 'layperson' rather than affirming any substantial differentiation." See "Does the So-Called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status?" in

differentiation on the basis of diversity of ministries, is based on the sacraments of baptism and confirmation,<sup>19</sup> and a common participation in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and the Church.<sup>20</sup> The Council provided further clarification. First, the mission of Christ is given to the whole people of God,<sup>21</sup> and “In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission.”<sup>22</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem* states clearly that lay people have a “special and indispensable” role in the Church and their mission is exclusive to them.<sup>23</sup> Second, *Lumen Gentium* emphasises the laity’s dignity *qua* baptised,<sup>24</sup> affirming that every lay person “is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself,” because “inserted as they are in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate.”<sup>25</sup> The laity’s mission has two focuses: involvement in the world and its transformation,<sup>26</sup> and involvement in the Church and

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*Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, vol. 1, edited by René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 598.

<sup>18</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.

<sup>19</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nos. 2, 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 32-33.

<sup>23</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 10, 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Hervi Rikhof notes that the dignity of every baptised Christian has two aspects. The first is the Christian’s “new being in Christ—in other words, his re-creation or *deification*. The second is that certain functions, tasks, rights and duties are connected with that new existence” (“The Competence of Priests, Prophets and Kings: Ecclesiological Reflections about the Power and Authority of Christian Believers,” *Concilium* 197 [1988] 59).

<sup>25</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3. The Council employed the Latin verb “inserti” (inserted or incorporated) to refer to the laity’s incorporation to the Mystical Body of Christ, and “configurantur” (configured) to describe the priest’s configuration to Christ the priest. The Latin text of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3 reads: “Per Baptismum enim corpori Christi mystico inserti, per Confirmationem virtute Spiritus Sancti roborati, ad apostolatam ab ipso Domino deputantur,” and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2: “Quare sacerdotium Presbyterorum initiationis christianae Sacramenta quidem supponit, peculiari tamen illo Sacramento confertur, quo Presbyteri, unctione Spiritus Sancti, speciali caractere signantur et sic Christo Sacerdoti configurantur, ita ut in persona Christi Capitis agere valeant.” *Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, Constitutiones Decreta Declarationes*, Cura et Studio Secretariae Generalis Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, ([Roma]: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1966) 463, 622-3.

<sup>26</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 3, 31, 33, 35; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nos. 6, 7; *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees*,

its growth.<sup>27</sup> The Council moved on to teach that temporal realities are good in themselves, and underscored the importance of family,<sup>28</sup> work, civic, and social life.<sup>29</sup> It related the participation of lay people in the threefold mission of Christ primarily to their place in the world, by affirming that the “secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity,” and lay people’s unique way of sharing in the mission of the Church is to “seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will.”<sup>30</sup>

The relationship between the laity and the hierarchy and religious was also clarified by Vatican II.<sup>31</sup> According to *Lumen Gentium*, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood “differ essentially and not only in degree”, but “each in its proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.”<sup>32</sup> However, the Council did not provide “a positive theological definition of the laity, but rather a description of and an outline of their functions.”<sup>33</sup> The 1983 *Code of*

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*Declarations*, vol. 1, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1996) no. 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 31, 33; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, vol. 1, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1996) no. 11. Hereafter, the full title will be abbreviated to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

<sup>28</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 11; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 35; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52.

<sup>29</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nos. 13-14; *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 26, 53, 60, 75; *Ad Gentes*: Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, vol. 1, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1996) no. 12. Henceforth the full title will be abbreviated to *Ad Gentes*.

<sup>30</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

<sup>31</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nos. 24-25. Angel Anton contends that Vatican II, while emphasising the baptismal equality of all Christians, did not reconcile “this principle of fundamental equality ... between pastors and ordinary believers, to make any inferences about the participation of the laity with full rights, that is to say, with a deliberative and not merely a consultative note, in decision making of various directive organs instituted since the Council at the local and universal levels of the Church.” See “Postconciliar Ecclesiology: Expectations, Results and Prospects for the Future,” in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, vol. 1, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 428-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Frederick J. Parrella, “The Laity in the Church,” *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 35 (1980) 273. For Parrella, the description of *Lumen Gentium* no. 31 has three essential elements: “(1) in a negative sense, the laity is ‘understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those in a religious state sanctioned by the Church’ ... (2) In a positive sense, the laity are the ‘faithful’ who are ‘by baptism made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ’.

*Canon Law*,<sup>34</sup> which was developed based on the theological insights of Vatican II,<sup>35</sup> gives a broader concept of lay people, defining them as the Christian faithful (*Christifideles*) who are not in holy orders.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, canonically speaking, the term laity also includes the unordained religious. In the *Codex*, the term “Christ’s faithful” includes not only the laity but also the clerics,<sup>37</sup> who never cease to be the Christ’s faithful. The *Codex* divides the Church into two groups: lay and cleric. *Lumen Gentium*, on the other hand, divides the church into three groups: lay, cleric, and religious.<sup>38</sup>

Figure 1 provides a graphic summary of Vatican II’s theology of the laity showing the relationship between the ecclesiological frameworks employed by *Lumen Gentium* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. The *ad extra* aspect of the *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

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(3) In a positive light again, what distinguishes the laity from others is ‘a secular quality’.” Ibid. In his view, “each of these essential elements presents a problem. The first element...defines the laity by what they are not, not what they are. The second element...positively defines the laity but only in a generic sense; what defines the laity also defines the clergy and religious since *all* are baptised, one with Christ and established as the people of God. The third element, the secular quality of the laity which distinguishes them from the clergy and religious, fails to offer a positive definition but merely specifies a function.” Ibid. For G. Chantraine, this typological definition has two aspects: the dignity of lay people is determined by the sacrament of baptism, and their place in the Church is made with reference to the ordained and the religious. See “Le laïc à l’intérieur des missions divines,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 109 (1987) 362.

<sup>34</sup> *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation*, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Canon Law Society (London: HarperCollins, 1997). Hereafter, this work will be cited as “The 1983 *Code of Canon Law*” followed by relevant canons, abbreviated to c. and cc.

<sup>35</sup> In the Bull of Promulgation, Pope John Paul II states that the new Code “can be viewed as a great effort to translate the conciliar ecclesiological teaching into canonical terms.” See “Apostolic Constitution,” In *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation*, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Canon Law Society (London: HarperCollins, 1997) xiv. Thomas J. Green notes that “John Paul II emphasized the following key ecclesiological themes as underlying the code: the Church as the people of God; hierarchical authority as service; the Church as communion with its wide-ranging implications for universal Church-particular Church relationships and primacy-episcopacy relationship; the participation of all the faithful in the threefold functions (*munera*) of Christ with its profound implications for their fundamental rights and duties; and, finally, the importance of the Church’s ecumenical commitment” (“The Church and the Law,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 374-5).

<sup>36</sup> Canon 207 says: “By divine institution, among Christ’s faithful there are in the Church sacred ministers, who in law are also called clerics; the others are called lay people.” Ibid., 44.

<sup>37</sup> The 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, c. 207.

<sup>38</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

framework could be expanded further by two other conciliar documents, namely *Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*, the former addressing the prophetic function and the latter the pastoral function of the Church.

### Vatican II's Theology of the Laity: Three Frameworks

<i>Lumen Gentium</i> Frameworks		<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> Framework	
The Common Priesthood of the Faithful	Priestly	<i>Ad intra</i>	<i>Ad extra</i>
	Prophetic		
	Pastoral		

Figure 1.

In the documents of Vatican II the terms “minister” and “ministry” occur over two hundred times but only nineteen of them apply to the activity of lay people.<sup>39</sup> A detailed study of these usages shows a clear progression in the Council’s understanding of lay ministry, initially with an *ad intra* focus and subsequently as *ad extra* activities of everyday Christian life.<sup>40</sup> The first usage occurs in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (nos. 29, 112, 122) where lay people

<sup>39</sup> Elissa Rinere, “Conciliar and Canonical Applications of ‘Ministry’ to the Laity,” *The Jurist* 47 (1987) 205. This paper provides a summary of her doctoral research on the subject, *The Term “Ministry” as Applied to the Laity in the Documents of Vatican II, Post Conciliar Documents of the Apostolic See, and the 1983 Code of Canon Law*, Canon Law Studies 519 (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1986).

<sup>40</sup> Elissa Rinere, “Conciliar and Canonical Applications of ‘Ministry’ to the Laity,” *The Jurist* 47 (1987) 205-16. Jon Nilson observes that “Vatican II did not foresee all the lay roles and ministries that would emerge since the council” (“The Laity,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 407).

were accepted as liturgical ministers and their ministry relates to the *munus sanctificandi*.<sup>41</sup> In the Degree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops *Christus Dominus* (no. 33), ministry is used to refer to the laity's participation in the diocesan curia sharing the *munus regendi* of the bishop. According to the Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* (e.g., no. 7), lay people who teach Catholic children attending non-Catholic schools are said to exercise a true ministry by continuing the *munus docendi* of the hierarchy. In contrast to the preceding documents, *Apostolicam actuositatem* and *Ad gentes* apply the term lay ministry to both activity within the Church—in fulfilment of the hierarchical munera, and work carried out in the world—in fulfilment of the *munera* of the people of God. *Gaudium et Spes*, the last conciliar document, considers the everyday activity of human life as ministry (e.g., no. 38). The positive understanding of the identity and role of lay people developed in the documents of Vatican II was the continuation of previous papal teachings such as the epochal statement made by Pope Pius XII in 1946: “The laity are the Church,”<sup>42</sup> and the culmination of preconciliar works on the subject by pioneers such as Yves Congar whose postconciliar writings continued to exercise a great influence on other theological interpreters of lay experience, hence deserving a special consideration.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Analysing nos. 33 and 35 of *Lumen Gentium*, Louis Ligier argues that lay people “can in certain circumstances ‘stand in’ for ministers of the Church in order to perform cultal and sacramental functions in their place.” See “‘Lay Ministries’ and their Foundations in the Documents of Vatican II,” in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, vol. 1, edited by René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 164.

<sup>42</sup> Giving an address to the new cardinals on 20 February 1946, Pius XII declared that “... i fedeli, e più precisamente i laici, si trovano nella linea più avanzata della vita della Chiesa; per loro la Chiesa è il principio vitale della società umana. Perciò essi, specialmente essi, debbono avere una sempre più chiara consapevolezza, non soltanto di appartenere alla Chiesa, ma di essere la Chiesa, vale a dire la comunità dei fedeli.... Essi sono la Chiesa.” See “Acta PII PP. XII: Allocutiones I,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 38:5 (1 April 1946) 149.

<sup>43</sup> Vatican II adopted the traditional *tria munera* schema that Congar had used as a framework for his classic work *Jalons pour une théologie du laïc,at*, published in 1953. According to Joseph A. Komonchak “there is no theologian who did more to prepare for Vatican II or who had a larger role in the orientation and even in the composition of the documents” (“The Return of Yves Congar,” *Commonweal* 110 [15 July 1983] 402). Thomas F. O’Meara argues that Congar had been “the most important theologian leading up to Vatican II.” See his chapter “Beyond ‘Hierarchology’: Johann Adam Möhler and Yves Congar,” in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. D.J. Dietrich and M.J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 173.

## 2.4 Yves Congar's Theology of the Laity

Since the Second Vatican Council there have been numerous theological interpretations of lay experience, the first representative, and probably the most influential of which was from the French Dominican, Yves Congar (1904-1995), the doyen of Catholic theologians of laity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who was sometimes hailed as *the* Vatican II theologian par excellence.<sup>44</sup> Writing Congar's obituary, Avery Dulles went further by suggesting in his eulogy that "Vatican II could almost be called Congar's Council."<sup>45</sup> The introductory paper to the first official collection of the FABC documents also starts with a quote from Congar's writings, implicitly acknowledging the FABC's appreciation of this theological giant.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, any contemporary theology of the laity, including that of the FABC, would be better understood with reference to Congar's thought on the vocation and mission of lay people. Therefore, it would be worthwhile here to review some of the salient features of his theology of the laity, focusing on his reflections after the Second Vatican Council. This section first reviews Congar's postconciliar writings on the identity and role of the laity. Second, it discusses his use of the Church community as a context for lay ministries with reference to his monumental *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* 1953 (translated as *Lay People in the Church*) arguing that the contextuality of his

<sup>44</sup> Etienne Fouilloux called him "*le théologien de Vatican II par excellence*"; see "Frère Yves, cardinal Congar, dominicain: Itinéraire d'un théologien," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologique* 79 (1995) 400.

<sup>45</sup> Avery Dulles, "Yves Congar: In Appreciation," *America* 173 (15 July 1995) 6. Penning his diary in the heyday of Vatican II Congar acknowledged the important role played by the Belgian theologians on the work of Vatican II, especially that of Gérard Philips who became secretary to the Doctrinal Commission in December 1963 stating that "sans aucun doute, c'est Mgr Philips l'artisan n° 1 de l'œuvre théologique du concile" (*Mon journal du Concile*, edited and annotated by Eric Mahieu, vol. 2 [Paris: Cerf, 2002] 56). Later, reflecting on his theological career, Congar expressed his satisfaction that the themes of his intellectual labour had reached the agenda of the Second Vatican Council: ecclesiology, Church reform, ecumenism, the laity, mission, ministries, collegiality, return to the sources and Tradition.... He humbly stated that "if there is a theology of Congar, that is where it is to be found." See Yves Congar, "Letter from Father Yves Congar, O.P.," *Theology Digest* 32:3 (Fall 1985) 215. Congar retains a distinction he made in 1939 between speculative theology as *intellectus fidei* and positive theology as *auditus fidei* but now integrates them more closely seeing speculative theology as deriving from the sources themselves, and positive theology as an attentiveness in the great witnesses of the bible, the fathers, the liturgy, the life of the church, and the magisterium. See "Reflections on Being a Theologian," *New Blackfriars* 62:736 (October 1981) 405.

<sup>46</sup> [Yves Congar], "[Asia] 'received the heritage of Catholic Christianity. And now the heirs have found their own voice; they can now speak for themselves.... It is now the time of the heirs'." Quoted by C.G. Arevalo, "... The Time of the Heirs," in *FAPA Vol. I*, xv.

theology of laity was more accentuated in the post-Vatican II period. This argument is further explicated by an examination of Congar's treatment of lay ministries as modes of service, in particular, his thinking on three postconciliar issues, namely the laity and theology, the role of women, and the secularity of lay people.

In Congar's theological journey one could trace the development of much Catholic theology of laity and ministries in a period of over 50 years before and after Vatican II.<sup>47</sup> His pre-conciliar thinking on these subjects crystallised in the publication in 1953 of his famous *Lay People in the Church* aiming to break down the then prevalent identification of the Church with the hierarchy and devoting special attention to the making of a theology of the laity, to whom the task of mediating between the Church and the world primarily belongs.<sup>48</sup> The first part of this book deals with the identity of the laity, the place of the theology of lay people, and the place of the laity in God's purpose. In the second part Congar reflects on the laity in the life of the Church as community and with regard to the Church's apostolic mission, in the framework of the priestly, kingly, and prophetic functions. Congar employs this trilogy as an organising principle of his book insisting that the lay people are, on the basis of their baptism and confirmation, acting subjects in their own right of the threefold office of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King.<sup>49</sup> This classic work, a most definitive treatment of the laity before Vatican II, and Congar's other preconciliar publications on the

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<sup>47</sup> Congar's bibliography includes over 1700 books and articles. See Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, "The Contribution of Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit," *Theological Studies* 62:3 (September 2001) 451, note 2.

<sup>48</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* [Signposts of a Theology of the Laity] (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1953). A revised edition, with addenda, was published in France in 1964. An English version of the book appeared as *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, revised edition, with additions by the author, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965). Five years earlier he lamented the fact that we did not have an adequate theology of the laity. See his article "Pour une théologie du laïcat," *Etudes* (January 1948) 42.

<sup>49</sup> Congar would continue to employ the *tria munera* schema to describe the functions of the laity. See "Sur la Trilogie: Prophète-Roi-Prêtre," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 67 (1983) 97-115. In another paper, "Prêtre, Roi, Prophète," he observed that the Second Vatican Council applied the trilogy to Christ, the laity and ordained ministers; for the ordained the Council followed the order "docteur, prêtre, pasteur/roi," and used "prêtre, prophète, roi" when referring to lay people. See *Seminarium* 23 (1983) 71. According to Congar these functions are only the aspects or dimensions of Christ's salutary *exousia*, and there exists a kind of circumincession between them. See "Quelques problèmes touchant les ministères," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 93 (1971) 791. Earlier he translated a paper by J. Fuchs who wrote a dissertation in 1941 arguing that the triple office schema has a Protestant origin. See "Origines d'une trilogie ecclésiologique à l'époque rationaliste de la théologie," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 53 (1969) 185-211.



vocation and mission of lay people brought new life to Vatican II's theology of the laity integrating laicology and ecclesiology. Of the several postconciliar papers which illustrate the development of Congar's thought, the most important text dealing with the role of the laity is a 1971 paper, which appeared a year later in English as "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries."<sup>50</sup> This 1971 paper is vintage Congar, who, at the age of 67, engaged in a *retractatio* revisiting several theses of his earlier book.<sup>51</sup> Therefore this section will provide a detailed analysis of this paper, giving only a cursory treatment of other writings such as the "ministries" articles which discuss the respective roles of laity and clergy, and his introduction to the French edition of the papal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*.<sup>52</sup>

#### 2.4.1 Identity and Role of Lay People

Toward the end of his life Congar admitted that, in *Lay People in the Church*, he had, to a certain degree, sought to explain the identity of the laity with reference to the priest. Now he believed that "the clergy need to be defined in relation to the laity, who

<sup>50</sup> Yves Congar, "Mon cheminement dans la théologie de laïcat et des ministères," in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1971) 9-30; idem, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 184.

<sup>51</sup> Yves Congar referred to the French version of his paper, published in 1971, as "notre 'retractatio'," in note 13. See "Quelques problèmes touchant les ministères," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 93 (1971) 792.

<sup>52</sup> See especially "Ministères et laïcat dans les recherches actuelles de la théologie catholique romaine," *Verbum Caro* 18 (1964) 127-48; "Ministères et structuration de l'Eglise," *La Maison Dieu* 102 (1970) 7-20; "Quelques problèmes touchant les ministères," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 93 (1971) 785-800; "Introduction," in *Les fidèles laïcs: Exhortation Apostolique de Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1991) i-iv. Most of Congar's postconciliar papers on the laity were penned in the last period of his theological career according to a model by Cornelis T.M. Van Vliet who divided Congar's thinking into four periods. The first period began from Congar's teaching activity (1931) to World War II during which he aimed to overcome a one-sided juridical understanding of the Church. The second time-frame was between the end of World War II and the announcement of the Vatican II when he endeavoured to rediscover the Church's communal and historical dimensions. The third period was the exciting ten years under the banner of the Second Vatican Council (1959-68) of experiencing and reformulating new Catholic understandings of the Church. Congar's later writings (1969-91), published in the last period of his intellectual life, sought to understand the Church in the tension between Christology and pneumatology. See Cornelis T.M. Van Vliet, "Yves Congar's ecclesiology and Vatican II," *Theology Digest* 45:2 (Summer 1998) 144-6. It is of note that Van Vliet's first three periods seem to follow Congar's own description of his theological career. See Yves "Letter from Father Yves Congar, O.P.," *Theology Digest* 32:3 (Fall 1985) 213-6. With respect to the last period see Yves M.J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols, trans. David Smith (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983). Elizabeth Teresa Groppe argues that Congar "transcended Roman Catholicism's separation of the ecclesiological and anthropological dimensions of the theology of the Spirit" ("Yves Congar's theology of the Holy Spirit" [Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1999] 23). See also her paper "The Contribution of Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit," *Theological Studies* 62:3 (September 2001) 451-78.

are quite simply members of the people of God animated by the Spirit,” and “it is no longer the layman who stands in need of definition but the priest.”<sup>53</sup> This theological approach is a long way from the one adopted by the German *Kirchenlexicon*, which under *Laien*, merely indicates: *siehe Clerus*, (Layman: see Clergy).<sup>54</sup> For the postconciliar Congar, “The laity are primarily the baptized,” and “Christians – clergy and lay – are people who have been baptized.”<sup>55</sup> Congar also frequently uses the expression “Christians *sine addito*” to define the lay person and further clarifies that lay spirituality is simply the spirituality of the Christian life.<sup>56</sup> In “My Path-Findings” Congar emphasises the laity’s secularity by describing the lay person as “the Christian who serves God and his kingdom in and by his natural engagement in this-worldly activity.”<sup>57</sup> He endorses Karl Rahner’s definition of the lay person as “one whose Christian being and Christian responsibilities are determined by his native insertion in the life and fabric of the world.”<sup>58</sup> Continuing the *triplex munus* schema developed in *Lay People in the Church* he stresses that the laity also have a role to play in the internal life of the Church participating in the priestly, kingly and prophetic offices.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, edited by Bernard Lauret (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 65-66; Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 182.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Yves Congar as “Tome VIII, 1891, col. 1891” in *L’Apostolat de laïcs. Décret “Apostolicam actuositatem,”* Unam Sanctam 75, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1970) 157, and as “t. 7, 1891, p. 1323” in “Laïc et laïcat,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976) col. 102; see also “Ministères et laïcat dans les recherches actuelles de la théologie catholique romaine,” *Verbum Caro* 18 (1964) 135.

<sup>55</sup> *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, edited by Bernard Lauret (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 66.

<sup>56</sup> Yves Congar, “Laïc et laïcat,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976) vol. 9, column 103; “The Laity,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966) 241, 244; see also “Discussion,” *ibid.*, 269.

<sup>57</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 172-3; see also “Ministères et laïcat dans les recherches actuelles de la théologie catholique romaine,” *Verbum Caro* 18 (1964) 135.

<sup>58</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, “The Laity,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966) 241; see also Karl Rahner, “L’apostolat des laïcs,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 1 (January 1956) 3-32.

<sup>59</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 173.

For the postconciliar Congar, the spiritual priesthood of every baptised Christian remains the background of his theology of the laity.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.4.2 Church as Context for Lay Ministries

In 1994, after being elevated to the cardinalate at the age of 90, he explicitly acknowledged the centrality of the “Church” in his theology: “The mystery of the Church was and is the center of my entire life as a Christian and theologian.”<sup>61</sup> This statement is remarkably consistent with his earliest theological reflections when he wrote back in 1935 that it is the task of theology in the twentieth century to announce to the world the mystery of the Church in all her depth and to define the real canonical status of the laity in the Church.<sup>62</sup> In *Lay People in the Church* Congar situates his theology of laity within the context of a “total ecclesiology,” built around two essential pillars: the Church *ad intra*, in its internal life, and the Church *ad extra*, in its relationship to the world.<sup>63</sup> In his analysis, “At bottom there can be only one sound and sufficient theology of laity, and that is a ‘total ecclesiology’.”<sup>64</sup> Nearly twenty years later, after reviewing that *magnum opus*, he concluded: “I have not written that ecclesiology.”<sup>65</sup>

In early 1970’s Congar admitted that, at the time of writing *Lay People in the Church*, he had a clerical view of the Church, and when contemplating to write a treatise on

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<sup>60</sup> Jean Puyo, *Une vie pour la vérité: Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar* ([Paris]: Le Centurion, 1975) 165-6.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Cornelis T.M. Van Liet, “Yves Congar’s Ecclesiology and Vatican II.” See *Theology Digest* 45:2 (Summer 1998) 147; see also Alan Woodrow, “Obituary: Yves Congar,” *The Tablet* (1 July 1995) 855; idem, “Diary of an Insider,” *The Tablet* (26 October 2002) 13.

<sup>62</sup> Yves Congar, “Bulletin de théologie,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologique* 24 (1935) 731. An abstract of this work was presented at the “Congar Ecumenical Colloquium” during the Fifty-Fifth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America held in San Jose, Calif., 8-11 June 2000 on the theme of “Catholicism and Public Life.”

<sup>63</sup> Yves Congar, “Pour une théologie du laïcat [Part 1],” *Etudes* (January 1948) 50-54; [Part 2] 200-1 and 216-7; Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, rev. ed., trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) xvii.

<sup>64</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, rev. ed., trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) xvi.

<sup>65</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 169.

the Church he adopted a Thomistic schema of Aristotle's four causes,<sup>66</sup> which was also used by Charles Journet in his monumental *L'Eglise du Verbe incarné*.<sup>67</sup> Later on, applying a 1886 model of Père Ambroise Gardeil, which associates "the four properties of the Church" with "the four causes," he related apostolicity to the hierarchical ministry as the instrumental cause of the Church, catholicity to humanity as the material cause of the Church, sanctity to salvation and the glory of God as the final cause of the Church, and unity to the formal cause of the Church.<sup>68</sup> The first correlation of the hierarchical ministry with instrumental cause translated into a linear sequence where "Christ makes the hierarchy and the hierarchy makes the Church as community of faithful."<sup>69</sup> Now he saw that at that time he had defined ministries apart from their proper context, the Church as community, and offered a different theological vision: "Christ willed a structured community"; "it was within the community of his disciples that he chose the Twelve"; and, "What is founded in the Twelve is not only the hierarchy but the Church."<sup>70</sup> In place of that linear schema he considers the community of the faithful as an appropriate perspective to discuss the laity and clergy, and contrasts two views on the laity that could emanate from two different entry points. If one enters by "the door of hierarchical priesthood" the laity will be seen as participating with the hierarchical apostolate (Pius IX and the Catholic Action), or to use Pius XII's formula, cooperating with the priesthood. But entering "by the door and concept of community" one would avoid making the hierarchy a

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<sup>66</sup> For an insightful discussion of the Aristotelean model of four causes, see Thomas Franklin O'Meara, "Philosophical Models in Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 39:1 (March 1978) 9-11.

<sup>67</sup> The table contained in the French version of Yves Congar's paper, which does not appear in "My Pathfindings," shows a much clearer relationship between these concepts. See "Mon cheminement dans la théologie de laïcité et des ministères," in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1971) 15; "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 175; see also "Ministères et structuration de l'Eglise," *La Maison Dieu* 102 (1970) 10. According to Dennis M. Doyle, "Journet is notable for having written the only formal comprehensive systematic treatise on the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century" ("Journet, Congar, and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 58 [1997] 463); see also Charles Journet, *L'Eglise du Verbe incarné*, 3 vols (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1941, 1951, 1969).

<sup>68</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 175. For a comparison between the schemas of Congar and Gardeil see Patrick Mullins, "The Spirit Speaks to the Churches: Continuity and Development in Congar's Pneumatology," *Louvain Studies* 29:3-4 (Fall-Winter 2004) 293.

<sup>69</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 175; "Ministères et structuration de l'Eglise," *La Maison Dieu* 102 (1970) 10.

<sup>70</sup> Yves Congar, "Ministères et structuration de l'Eglise," *La Maison Dieu* 102 (1970) 10; "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 175, 177-8.

mediating agency that renders the laity “impotent and passive.”<sup>71</sup> In revising his position this way, Congar examined the Church as a faith community or communion,<sup>72</sup> one of the prominent themes in the post-Vatican II literature on the laity, including the documents of the FABC.<sup>73</sup> Starting with the faith community as the context for his ecclesiological discourse Congar went beyond the “hiérarchologie” and the ecclesiological mentality of the Enlightenment,<sup>74</sup> to emphasise service rather than structure, sacramental initiation rather than office, further clarifying who the laity are, and what they are for, in the context of the Church which exists entirely for God and for people, a constant praise to God, completely devoted to mission, at the service of humankind.<sup>75</sup> In the last period of his theological career, his thinking focused more on the Church’s pneumatological dimension, defining it as a structured community, or “hierarchical communion” under the activity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>76</sup> In this framework

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<sup>71</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 177.

<sup>72</sup> According to Avery Dulles, “Among the various metaphors, Congar gave a certain preference to ‘Temple of the Holy Spirit,’ which suggested the dimensions on interiority and spirituality, giving rise to an ecclesiology of communion.” See his article “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 425.

<sup>73</sup> The FABC would select the theme of Church as faith community for its third Plenary Assembly, held in 1982, and apply this model to the contextual realities of Asia. See FABC III, “The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia,” *FAPA Vol. 1*, 49-65.

<sup>74</sup> Yves Congar, *Ministère et communion Ecclésiale* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1971) 10; “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 170; The Enlightenment’s ecclesiological mentality was summarised by Johann Adam Möhler in a now famous statement: “Gott schuf die Hierarchie und für die Kirche ist nun bis zum Weltende mehr als genug besorgt.” Quoted by Yves Congar in *L’Eglise: De saint Augustin à l’époque moderne* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1970) 383; Möhler’s statement originally appeared in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 1823, 497.

<sup>75</sup> My loose translation from the French of Congar’s statement: “Il est plus vrai de dire que l’Église est tout entière ‘pour-Dieu’ et ‘pour-les-hommes’; tout entière louange de Dieu et tout entière mission, au service de hommes.” See Jean Puyo, *Une vie pour la vérité: Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar* ([Paris]: Le Centurion, 1975) 218.

<sup>76</sup> “... je la [the Church] vois tout entière travaillée par l’Esprit, constituée d’une multiplicité de personnes recevant chacune des dons de l’Esprit et vivant dans la communion.” See Jean Puyo, *Une vie pour la vérité: Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar* ([Paris]: Le Centurion, 1975) 216. On the expression “hierarchical communion” see Yves Congar, “Pneumatology Today,” *American Ecclesiastical Review* 167 (1973) 435-49 at 443; see also his “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 176, 178. In his monumental three-volume work, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* Congar states that the Church “is above all a sacramental and doxological communion” (vol. 2, translated by David Smith [New York: The Seabury Press, 1983] 223). For Cornelis T.M. Van Vliet, Congar’s understanding of the Church over more than 60 years “can be summed up by the concept *communio sacramentalis*” (“Yves Congar’s Ecclesiology and Vatican II,” *Theology Digest* 45:2 [Summer 1998] 146). Avery Dulles also notes that Congar “preferred to define the Church essentially as a community in the Spirit, a *congregatio fidelium*” (“A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50 [1989] 425). In Aidan Nichols’ view, “Congar’s ecclesiology, in

of structured community Congar explicated his view of ministries as modes of service.

### 2.4.3 Ministries as Modes of Service

Indeed, from 1970s, Congar's writings focused more on the ministerial aspect of the Church, highlighting the various charisms received and tasks undertaken by the laity. He considered that "service" and "ministry" are two translations of the same Greek word *diakonia*, but "ministry" means much more than "service" because "it expresses an assured function in service of the Church."<sup>77</sup> Congar employs the plural form of the word "ministries" to describe lay people's activities, with an emphasis on the co-responsibility of all members of the Church, which in his view is built up by both ordained and lay ministries.<sup>78</sup> For him, ministries are "*modes of service* of what a community is to be and do,"<sup>79</sup> and "they exist right now, but up to now [1971] were not called by their true name, ministries, nor were their place and status in ecclesiology recognized."<sup>80</sup> In Congarian theology, ministries exist if the following three conditions are realised: "There must be an essential service for the Church"; "it has to be stable"; and "it should be recognized at the highest level."<sup>81</sup> He further identifies three levels of ministry.<sup>82</sup> The first level of general ministries consists of a variety of occasional, temporary, and spontaneous services, such as mothers giving catechetical instructions to their children, leading bible study groups, visiting the sick

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sharp contrast to his original inspiration, Möhler, became less Christological and more pneumatic as he grew older" (*Yves Congar* [London: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989] 61).

<sup>77</sup> *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, edited by Bernard Lauret (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 67.

<sup>78</sup> Yves Congar, "Quelques problèmes touchant les ministères," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 93 (1971) 792.

<sup>79</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 178.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>81</sup> *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, edited by Bernard Lauret (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 67; Yves M.-J. Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 176; *id.*, "Pneumatology Today," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 167 (1973) 445.

<sup>82</sup> Yves Congar, "Ministères et structuration de l'Eglise," in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: du Cerf, 1971) 43-9.

and imprisoned, etc. Ministries in the second level are more organised, more stable, and more related to the usual activities of the Church than those in the first level, including catechists, lectors, Eucharistic ministers, etc. The ordained ministries of diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate belong to the third level, and are more directly related to the structure of the Church than ministries of the first and second levels, which are directly related to the life of the Church.<sup>83</sup> Congar further argued that the proper starting point is to understand the nature of ministry and its many different forms, and not to proceed with the distinction between the ordained and non-ordained. He concluded: “the decisive coupling is not the ‘priesthood/laity’ as I used it in *Jalons* but rather ‘ministries’/modes of community service.”<sup>84</sup> From this approach, Congar proposed two compatible schemata,<sup>85</sup> depicted in the Figure 2, to substitute the linear schema, which places the clergy before or outside the community.

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<sup>83</sup> Congar considers *structure* as the principles “that constitute men [*sic*] as Christ’s Church” such as “the deposit of faith, the deposit of the sacraments of faith, and the apostolic powers,” and by *life* he means “the activity which men [*sic*] exercise in order that the Church may fulfil her mission and attain her end” [*Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, revised edition, with additions by the author, trans. Donald Attwater [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965] 262]. Patrick Mullins notes that “inspired by Möhler, Congar recognised that it was important to ‘balance’ a Christological ecclesiology, understood as the origin and cause of the structure of the Church, with a ‘pneumatological and charismatic’ ecclesiology, understood as being responsible for the life and for the ‘interior communion’ of the Church in faith and love” (“The Spirit Speaks to the Churches: Continuity and Development in Congar’s Pneumatology,” *Louvain Studies* 29:3-4 [Fall-Winter 2004] 292).

<sup>84</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 176, 178.

<sup>85</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 178; “Mon cheminement dans la théologie du laïcat et des ministères,” in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1971) 19. Unlike Schema 1 in *The Jurist* article where the word “ministers” is used, the French version of the same schema in both *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* and *La Maison-Dieu* employs the term “ministères” (ministries). See “Ministères et structuration de l’Eglise,” *La Maison-Dieu* 102 (1970) 13. For Congar, Schema 1, the model adopted by the theologians at the Ecumenical Council of the Churches, is a very interesting and valid framework, but it requires some clarification (“Ministères et structuration de l’Eglise,” *La Maison-Dieu* 102 [1970] 13). Schema 2 is his brainchild and preferred model.

### Ministerial Schemata Proposed by Yves Congar

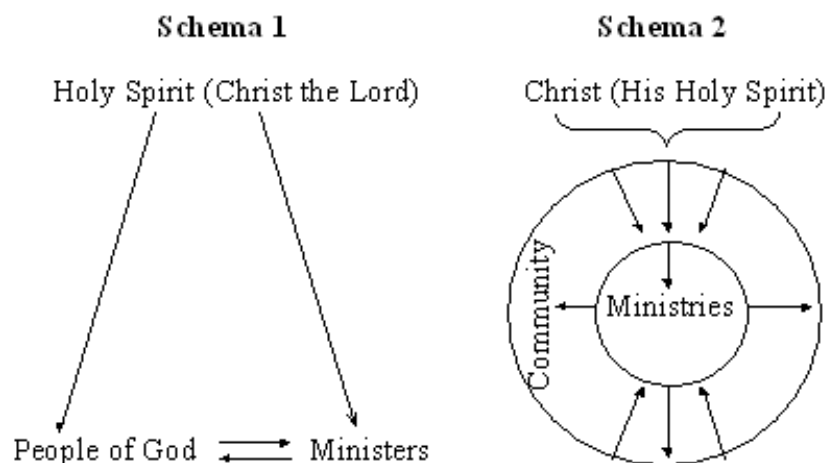


Figure 2.

The first schema expresses separate and concomitant actions of the Holy Spirit and Christ the Lord on the ministers and on the people of God, who interact with each other.<sup>86</sup> The second schema shows Christ and his Holy Spirit acting together on the community, within which various ministries, including those of the ordained, exist.<sup>87</sup> In this schema, ministries exist within the community and not outside it or above it, and both ministries and community directly depend on Christ and his Spirit. This schema is based on his conviction that the Church, a structured community, is constituted by both the missions of Jesus Christ and the Spirit who is the “Co-instituting Principle of the Church.”<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Yves Congar, “Ministères et structuration de l’Eglise,” *La Maison Dieu* 102 (1970) 13.

<sup>87</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 178.

<sup>88</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, trans. David Smith (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983) 7. Congar remarks that earlier he has worked “too exclusively in a context of dualism and made too radical a distinction between the institution as derived from Christ and free interventions on the part of Spirit”. He went on to admit that his “mistake” was that he has “followed the Acts more closely than the Pauline epistles,” and as a result he “was not sufficiently conscious of the unity that exists between the activity of the Spirit and that of the *glorified Christ*” (ibid., 11-2). For Joseph Famerée, there was a pneumatological unbalance in Congar’s earlier writings where his perspective was more Christological than pneumatological. However, this “déséquilibre pneumatologique” would be adjusted in his later works such as *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. See “L’Ecclésiologie du Père Yves Congar,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 76 (1992) 408. Some ten years earlier, Congar noted that, when writing in 1960, “the pneumatological aspect, although it is very important, has been rather overshadowed by the Christological aspect.” See note 16 in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, trans. David Smith (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983) 23.



Congar's theology of ministries is further amplified by the concept of apostolicity, a mark of the Church that is not simply a matter of apostolic succession but, more decisively, an apostolicity of faith.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, in the whole Church as apostolic each lay faithful is in communion with all, and ordained ministers have specific functions corresponding to their charisms and mission in the organic unity of the Church.<sup>90</sup> "Here, too," Congar wrote in his *retractatio*, "I have gradually corrected my vision which at first was principally and spontaneously clerical."<sup>91</sup> In this framework Congar reviewed some of his earlier theses on three areas relating to lay ministries: the laity and theology, the role of women in the Church, and the functions of lay people in the temporal and spiritual orders. First, in *Lay People in the Church*, Congar suggested that "the laity's place in Catholic thinking is considerable: engaged in all the life of the world, they can bring a rich harvest of problems and thought to the Church."<sup>92</sup> However, he immediately cautioned that "no attempt should be made to put the laity in the clergy's place and turn them into doctors of divinity."<sup>93</sup> In his thinking at that time, "Theology properly so-called is pre-eminently a clerical, priestly learning,"<sup>94</sup> and the laity's theology "is sometimes too much influenced by their temporal,

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<sup>89</sup> Yves Congar, "Quelques problèmes touchant les ministères," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 93 (1971) 798; "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 180.

<sup>90</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 181.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, rev. ed., trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 311. For Avery Dulles, "A century after Newman, Yves Congar, building to some degree on Newman's work, expressed the desire that lay people should personally appropriate the Catholic tradition and pass it on by faithfully living it" (*Newman* [London: Continuum, 2002] 109). Newman's position on lay theology was summarised in his *Lectures on The Present Position of Catholics in England* (New York: America Press, 1942) 300: "I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men [*sic*] who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know where they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well, that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it." Cited by Dulles, *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, rev. ed., trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 311.

<sup>94</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 310. Avery Dulles opines that John Henry Newman would agree with Congar on this matter. See *Newman* (London: Continuum, 2002) 109. In his view, "Newman, writing within the horizons of his own day, considered it rather exceptional for lay people to be theologians.... Although Newman did not see dogmatic theology as a common vocation of the laity, he looked forward to the formation of a class of mature Christians with a keen sense of faith." *Ibid.*, 108.

political and cultural sympathies.”<sup>95</sup> Now, nearly twenty years later, Congar formally declared himself in favour of the lay practice of theology.<sup>96</sup> On the issue of the role of women in the Church, Congar affirmed that “the role of women in the Church is truly immense. The first priority is to recognize it, to give it a name and a status.”<sup>97</sup> Once that has been done, he believed that “a wide vista of upward movement, discovery, and creation will open up.”<sup>98</sup> However, while not convinced that women are excluded from the ministerial priesthood by divine law, his position was negative on the ordination of women to the priesthood.<sup>99</sup> In the introduction to the French edition of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* Congar wrote that he was personally happy with John Paul II’s view that women must be heard in the discussion and decision forums at different levels of the parish and diocese, and he added, at the level of the Roman Curia.<sup>100</sup> Thirdly, for Congar, secularity (*sécularité*) or laicality (*laïcité*)—the latter term was employed in *Lay People in the Church*, is a theological character of the laity,<sup>101</sup> meaning that they live their own Christian and

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<sup>95</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 311.

<sup>96</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 183.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Yves Congar, “Introduction,” in *Les fidèles laïcs: Exhortation Apostolique de Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1991) iii.

<sup>101</sup> Yves Congar, “Laïc et laïcat,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, edited by M. Viller et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976) vol. 9, cols. 103-7. It is worth noting that there is a vast difference between the theological categories of *sécularité* or *laïcité* and the legal concept of *laïcité*—often translated as secularity—a law that was introduced in France in 1905 to “put an end to centuries of bloodshed and fighting between two Frances, the clerical and the lay,” and to enshrine the separation of Church and state, stating that “the Republic does not recognise, subsidise or renumerate any religious body.” See Alain Woodrow, “The President’s Revolution,” *The Tablet* (2 February 2008) 8. The delicate question of *laïcité* has recently gained some notoriety, especially in France, when French President Nicolas Sarkozy advocated “the use of religion as a stabilising factor in society, and as a purveyor of values in education.” Ibid. Sarkozy proposed and defined a new concept of *laïcité positive* “not only as the separation of Church and State, but as a recognition of the positive role of believers in society.” Ibid. For A.N. Williams, “some of the terms denoting the laity in French have overtones they do not have in English,” and that “Congar himself points to this problem of vocabulary in his native language, remarking upon the specific connotations of *laïcisme* and *laïcité*, for example: the former denoting secularism and the latter, the religious neutrality of state education.” See A.N. Williams, “Congar’s Theology of the Laity,” in *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, edited by Gabriel Flynn (Louvain: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005) 140-1.

apostolic life in the structures and life of the secular world.<sup>102</sup> Reiterating Vatican II's understanding of the world, or the temporal order, as the dynamic totality of human enterprises encompassing "scientific and technological research, culture, the undertaking of social justice and social development,"<sup>103</sup> with the kingdom of God as its spiritual referent, Congar argued that while the entire Church community, including the ordained, acts in faith and charity in the world, not by power but by influence, the temporal sphere is the laity's proper domain or zone of action,<sup>104</sup> and their role is to provide a bridge between the Church and the world.<sup>105</sup>

#### 2.4.4 Concluding Remarks

In sum, Congar's postconciliar theology of laity and ministries displays three distinctive features: a positive definition of the laity based on their secularity, the use of the concept of faith community as the starting point for theological reflection on ministries, and an emphasis on the diversity of ministries as different modes of service to realise the unique and multiform mission of the Church in and for the world. The changes in Congar's postconciliar writings on the laity were generally gradual with key ideas already present in his earlier publications, especially his classic *Lay People in the Church*. Overall, Congarian writings in the preconciliar and postconciliar periods held in fruitful tension the two poles of tradition and *Sitz-im-Leben*. On a continuum of Stephen Bevans' models of contextual theology, his postconciliar theology of laity shifted from the more conservative pole of "gospel message and tradition" to the radical pole of "culture and social change."<sup>106</sup> In *Lay People in the*

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<sup>102</sup> Yves Congar, "Introduction," in *Les fidèles laïcs: Exhortation Apostolique de Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1991) iii.

<sup>103</sup> Yves M.-J. Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 186.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>105</sup> Y. Congar, "Apports, richesses et limites du Décret," in *L'Apostolat des laïcs: Décret "Apostolicam actuositatem"*, edited by Y. Congar, Unam Sanctam 75 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1970) 180, 179.

<sup>106</sup> Stephen B. Bevans proposes five models of contextual theologies: translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, and transcendental. See *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992) 26-8. He places these models between a radical pole of "culture, social change" and a conservative pole of "gospel message, tradition." *Ibid.* In his view, these models are not exclusive of one another, and the relative position of each model is determined by its leaning toward either of the two poles. *Ibid.*

*Church* Congar was more concerned with mining the riches of the past to ensure that his theology of laity is firmly anchored in traditional sources by exploring the participation of lay people in the *triplex munus* of Christ in the patristic writings and the writings of the Middle Ages. After Vatican II, he continued to maintain an interest in, and used, the *tria munera* schema to discuss the mission of the laity but his reflection became more contextualised; his emphasis was on ministries and contemporary topics such as the laity and theology, the role of women in the Church, and the secularity of lay people. There was a discernible shift in emphasis in his theology of laity, from a preconciliar *ressourcement* to a postconciliar *aggiornamento*, an endeavour to deal with the experience of the Christian communities of the day.<sup>107</sup> Before the Council he was more bent on restoring the rightful dignity and place of the laity in the Church. After the Council his fertile reflection was directed towards addressing the expectations of the laity ensuring that they are empowered to participate in the Church's mission, and their ministries are officially recognised and appreciated. As the father of the Catholic theology of laity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Congar also had a marked influence on other postconciliar theologies of lay experience including the contextual theology of laity of the FABC. In 1977, the FABC held an "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church," no doubt inspired by Congar's *retractatio*, the article entitled "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries" which was published only a few years earlier.<sup>108</sup> This Colloquium was one in a series of seminars and workshops that the Asian bishops devoted to study the role of the laity in their journey of reflection on the evangelising mission of the Church in Asia. This theological reflection was developed in dynamic interaction with many different schools of thought. Hence, an overview of other postconciliar theologies of the laity, as one surveyed by Leonard Doohan, will assist in situating the FABC's theology of laity in a proper context.

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<sup>107</sup> Dennis M. Doyle claims Congar as "a premier theologian of *ressourcement*." See "Journet, Congar, and Communion Theology," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 463.

<sup>108</sup> FABC, "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church," *FAPA Vol. 1*, 67-92.

## 2.5 Leonard Doohan's Theology of the Laity

According to Leonard Doohan, the motifs of Vatican II's teachings are community, incarnation, and service.<sup>109</sup> In light of these themes, increased emphasis has been given to the values of lay life and lay mission. Doohan contends that three specific developments of Vatican II have arrested the downward trend in the life and role of the laity that began approximately from the end of the third century. The first is Vatican II's stress on the notion of Church as communion, hence encouraging co-responsibility and collaboration of all members of the Church. The other two developments are linked to the Council's universal call to holiness, and its declaration on the autonomy of the temporal order coupled with the teaching that building a better world is part of God's plan.<sup>110</sup> For Doohan, five different theologies of the laity exist, which are "often due to separating one of the three conciliar developments from the other two," and each of these theologies of laity is implied in and depends on a particular model of the Church.<sup>111</sup> The first theological approach sees the role of the laity being dependent on the hierarchy and their ministry as instrumental to that of the hierarchy. This theological interpretation assumes that only the hierarchy have received a mission and authority from Christ, and therefore, the laity would need the clergy's authorisation to participate in the Church's mission. In Doohan's second approach, lay people appear as an ecclesial presence to the world; being naturally inserted into the temporal order, they have a specific and exclusively proper mission. This school of thought is based on the theological conviction that secular realities are good and valuable in themselves, and an understanding of the Church as the sacrament of the world, in the world, and at the service of the world. The third approach to lay experience, which Doohan calls a theology of world transformation, is related to, and implicit in, the theology of ecclesial presence. The emphasis here,

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<sup>109</sup> Leonard Doohan, "Theology of the Laity," in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig (Newtown, Australia: E.J. Dwyer, 1994) 494.

<sup>110</sup> Leonard Doohan, "Theology of the Laity," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press) 639.

<sup>111</sup> Leonard Doohan, "Theology of the Laity," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press) 639-40; idem, *Laity's Mission in the Local Church: Setting a New Direction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) 4-5; idem, *The Lay-Centered Church: Theology and Spirituality* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1984) 4-23; idem, "Contemporary Theologies of the Laity: An Overview Since Vatican II," *Communio* 7 (1980) 228-41.

however, is on the exercise of lay ministries in the world; their role is to change the world and redeem it for the glory of God because the world is at the same time the context of human redemption and in need of redemption. This theology postulates that lay people are not only *in* the world but *for* the world, emphasising their social responsibility and their endeavours to eliminate injustices. Doohan's fourth theological approach advocates a restructuring of the Church based a new understanding of the role of the laity which derives from an emphasis on the Church as community, on co-responsibility and collegiality, and on mission as a function of the entire Church. Other signs that call for ecclesial restructuring include the development of basic ecclesial communities, an emphasis on the priesthood of the faithful, and the creation of new lay ministries to meet community needs. His fifth type of theological interpretation is the theology of self-discovery for the laity. This is an exploratory approach undertaken by many lay people who engage in new ministries or participate in new forms of faith sharing. Like many existing religious organisations and spiritual movements, these ministries are situational by nature, being created to respond to a specific need. They are at times *ad hoc* initiatives but in some ways also life-styles. Lay people discover their specific mission through these experiences, which often lead them to form a different view of their identity and role in the Church.

Doohan believes that each of these five theologies has its inherent strengths and weaknesses.<sup>112</sup> He contends that there has been a growing demand for an approach to the Church that can be readily understood by all laity, and thus proposes the model of the "Church as family."<sup>113</sup> Each of the five models that Doohan explicates above seems to be biased toward either the maximalist or the minimalist tendency. The former considers all lay activities as "ministry" while the latter restricts the word to apostolic activities performed by the ordained, or to ecclesial functions sanctioned by the Church. The following section will further investigate the various meanings of the terms "ministry" and "lay ministry" in contemporary theologies setting the scene for a detailed analysis of the FABC's theology of laity in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

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<sup>112</sup> Leonard Doohan, *Laity's Mission in the Local Church: Setting a New Direction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

## 2.6 The Changing Meaning of Ministry and Lay Ministry

Since the Second Vatican Council there has been some confusion as to the meaning of the words “ministry” and “lay ministry.”<sup>114</sup> The latter term is “definitely a creation of the post-Vatican II church.”<sup>115</sup> Both the Council and the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* never used the term “lay ministry,” leaving theologians and local Churches the task of developing their definition. The following section provides a chronological survey of some representative definitions or descriptions of the terms “lay ministry” or “ministry” which have been proposed since the end of Vatican II up to 2001.<sup>116</sup>

According to James Coriden, ministry is “the descriptive term for the whole range of service functions performed within the community of Christian believers, the tasks related to worship and sacrament as well as those which seek to satisfy the gamut of human needs, individual and social.”<sup>117</sup> In December 1977 a group of Catholic laity and clergy issued the Declaration *The Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* arguing that “the involvement of lay people in many Church ministries” was leading to “a devaluation of the unique ministry” of lay people in the world.<sup>118</sup> The group emphasises that lay people are the Church-in-the-world, and their primary ministry is “to transform the world of political, economic and social institutions” through their

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<sup>114</sup> John A. Collins observes that “over the past fifty years the word ‘ministry’ has ceased to mean what it used to mean in ecclesiology. Always once referring to the ordained leadership and pastoral practice of a church, the term was actually only lightly used within Roman Catholic circles, and there more often than not had a reference to ministry in Protestant practice .... Within a few years of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council such ingrained usage quickly underwent a full circle of change .... The words ‘mission’, ‘apostolate’ and ‘ministry’ itself applied indiscriminately to hierarchical and lay participation in the pastoral life of the Church” (“Fitting Lay Ministries into a Theology of Ministry: Responding to an American Consensus,” *Worship* 79:2 [March 2005] 156). For instance, ministerial words in no. 38 of *Gaudium et Spes* apply only to the laity while in no. 24 of *Lumen Gentium* they refer to the office of bishops. Ibid., 156-7.

<sup>115</sup> H. Richard McCord, “Lay Ministry: Living Its Questions,” *Origins* 19:46 (19 April 1990) 757. Neil Ormerod observes that *Sacramentum Mundi* (1968-70) “has no entry on ministry at all,” and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967-79) “has a telling heading, ‘Ministry, Protestant’,” (“Mission and Ministry in the Wake of Vatican II,” *Australian EJournal of Theology* 1 [August 2003] 2).

<sup>116</sup> We will limit our survey to year 2001, the cut-off date for our investigation of the FABC’s theology of the laity, from 1970 to 2001.

<sup>117</sup> James A. Coriden, “Ministry,” *Chicago Studies* (Fall 1976) 305.

<sup>118</sup> The Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern, in *Challenge to the Laity*, ed. Ed Marciniak et al., (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980) 20-3.

professional and occupational lives.<sup>119</sup> Just over a year later, the Latin American bishops, continuing the thrust of the Medellín Conference,<sup>120</sup> issued the Puebla document (Jan-Feb 1979), which gives a clear approval of the two key elements of the practice of liberation theology—the forming of basic ecclesial communities and the preferential but not exclusive love for the poor. These prelates called on Latin American Christians to perceive “the responsibilities of their faith in their personal life and in their social life” through a process of conscientisation.<sup>121</sup>

In 1982, members of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches unanimously approved the historical text *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* recommending that “the Church must discover the ministry which can be provided by women as well as that which can be provided by men.”<sup>122</sup> Joseph Komonchak prefers to stress that “the whole Church is the primary minister of Christ in the world,” and “the various ministries are the concrete ways in which the Church ... articulates its responsibility for its own self-realization in the world.”<sup>123</sup> George Tavad reduces ministry to four functions: “proclamation, worship, education and service.”<sup>124</sup> For Thomas O’Meara, Christian ministry is “the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, “The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council” (August 26-September 6, 1968 [Medellín, Columbia]), in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited with introductions, commentary and translations by Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990) 99. In Peru, nineteen Church organisations jointly offered suggestions to the Peruvian bishops attending the Medellín Conference, emphasising that lay people “cannot evade their commitment to social change,” and must “participate in the church’s work of evangelization, sanctification, and service.” See Peruvian Organisations, “The Role of the Laity, (June 1-2, 1968),” *ibid.*, 84-88.

<sup>121</sup> [Latin American Bishops], Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops “Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future” (Pueblo de los Angeles, Mexico, January 27-February 13, 1979) in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited with introductions, commentary and translations by Alfred T. Hennelly, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990) 225-58. Paulo Freire defines conscientisation—*conscientização* in Brazilian—as a “probing of the ambience, of reality,” or a “commitment in time” because it goes deeper than the French expression *prise de conscience* and “implies a historical commitment.” See his 1970 paper “Conscientizing as a Way of Liberating,” *ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>122</sup> World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) 24.

<sup>123</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, “Church and Ministry,” *The Jurist* (43:2 (1983) 283-4.

<sup>124</sup> George H. Tavad, *A Theology of Ministry* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983) 128.



of a Christian community to witness to, serve and realize the kingdom of God.”<sup>125</sup>

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* applies the term ministry to lay activities within the Church in just seven of its 1,752 canons,<sup>126</sup> as “a fulfilment of the hierarchical *munera* only,” and their exercise requires ecclesiastical authorisation.<sup>127</sup> In the *Codex*, lay people can participate in common,<sup>128</sup> public,<sup>129</sup> and under certain conditions, jurisdictional ministry.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Franklin O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 142. This definition is based on six characteristics which, he argues, constitute the nature of ministry: “Ministry is: (1) doing something; (2) for the advent of the kingdom; (3) in public; (4) on behalf of a Christian community; (5) which is a gift received in faith, baptism and ordination; and which is (6) an activity with its own limits and identity within a diversity of ministerial actions.” Ibid., 136. O’Meara also surveys the change in the meaning of “ministry” in six historical periods of the Church, and argues that each of these periods still has some bearing on the theory and praxis of ministry today. Ibid., 95-133, at 97-8. The first period is a “move from communal diversity and universality to a small number of ministries with prominence given to the service of leadership (*episcopalization*) and a further alteration of fulltime ministry to a sacral statement (*sacerdotalization*).” The second period of “*monasticization*” involves “the reforming and ministerial expansion of the monastery.” The “dominance of one structure in the order of offices (*hierarchization*)” represents the third period. The “*pastorization* of ministry” wrought by the Reformation represents the fourth, followed by “the Counter-Reformation’s organization of ministry along the lines of Baroque papacy and spirituality” where the Pope emerged as the source of all ministry. Finally, the “*romanticization* of the ministry” in the nineteenth century.” Ibid., 97-8. Paul Bernier expands O’Meara’s schema into thirteen periods or movements by breaking down O’Meara’s periods into shorter time frames and adding two periods to cover the post-Vatican years: “The Foundations of Ministry: The Apostolic Age (27-70)”; “Ministry as Charism: The Post-Apostolic Age (70-110)”; “From Ministry to Bishop: The Period of Establishment (110-313)”; “Priesthood as Ministry: From State Church to Empire Collapse (313-500)”; “The Monastery as Minister: The Feudal Period to the East/West Split (500-1054)”; “Ministry as Hierarchy: The Age of Scholasticism (1055-1414)”; “The Reformation of Ministry: The End of the Medieval Church (1415-1565)”; “Ministry as Cult: The Fortress Church (1565-1962)”; “The Reappraisal of Ministry: The Period of *Aggiornamento* (1962-1965),” and “Reappraising Presbyteral Ministry: The New Theology of Vatican II (1962-1965)”; “Unresolved Problems in Ministry: In the Shadow of Vatican II (1965-2000)”; “Toward an Evangelical Ministry: The Third Millennium (2000-),” and “Reintegrating the Laity: The Age of the Laity (2000-).” See *Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992) 11-278.

<sup>126</sup> See the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 230, 759, 910, 943, 1481, 1502, and 1634; Elissa Rinere, “Conciliar and Canonical Applications of ‘Ministry’ to the Laity,” *The Jurist* 47:1 (1987) 216-20. The *Codex* makes use of the “priest-prophet-king” schema in its structure and content, separating codification concerning *munus regendi* (not mentioned by name in the title of Book II) from that concerning *munus docendi* (Book III) and *munus sanctificandi* (Book IV).” See the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 204-1253.

<sup>127</sup> Elissa Rinere, “Conciliar and Canonical Applications of ‘Ministry’ to the Laity,” *The Jurist* 47:1 (1987) 216-9. For John Alesandro, “there is still ambivalence in the code: Are laity true lay ministers or are they only supplementary ministers?” See “The Code of Canon Law: Past, Present and Future,” *Origins* 37:23 (15 November 2007) 362. Rik Torfs notes that “*munus* does not refer to a specific office but to major tasks which operate also through offices.” See “*Auctoritas – potestas – jurisdictio – facultas – officium – munus*: a conceptual analysis,” *Concilium* 197 (April 1988) 69. According to Torfs, the term *munus* occurs less than two hundred times in the 1983 Code, and “in many of these instances it appears in the application (task).” Ibid., 70. On the other hand, the term *officium* is used some 260 times in the 1983 Code, and mainly refers to an “ecclesiastical office.” Ibid., 68-9.

<sup>128</sup> The 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 225-226.

Writing two monographs on ministry, Edward Schillebeeckx makes a sharp distinction between the notion of ministry between “the *beginning* of the first millennium and the *end* of the second,” and proposes “a fourth ministry, alongside the episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate, bestowed by the community of the church and its leaders on pastoral workers.”<sup>131</sup> In a pastoral letter as Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin discusses ministry from a functional and relational perspective, and describes it as “a specific activity supported and designated by the Church, which discloses the presence of God in some way in our human situation and empowers us to live more fully in the mystery of God—in communion with God and one another.”<sup>132</sup> With a focus on caring for society, Robert Kinast believes that “the ultimate significance of the term lay ministry is not to be found in a definition,” but in the actual experience of the laity, hence the primary task is not so much to define the term as to interpret it.<sup>133</sup> Sharon Euart expands the usage of the term ministry to

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<sup>129</sup> The 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 145, 229, 230, 339, 443, 493-4, 451, 483, 494, 451, 536-7, 617, 620-1, 627, 636, 651, 1168, 1424, 1428, 1435.

<sup>130</sup> The 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 129, 228, 274, 764, 766, 785, 812, 1111-2, 1421. According the *Codex*, the people of God is made up of the baptised faithful, who are called, “each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world.” *Ibid.*, c. 204.

<sup>131</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 1985) 3-4, 266; *idem*, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); also published as *Ministry: A Case for Change* (London: SCM Press, 1981).

<sup>132</sup> Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, “Ministry: In Service of One Another,” *Origins* 15:9 (1 August 1985) 136. For Bernardin, ministry is “ultimately directed toward establishing a life in communion with God and with one another, a way of life which manifests the kingdom of God in our midst.” *Ibid.*, 135. In his view, ministries and ministers could be differentiated in five ways: by different forms of ecclesial recognition and designation; according to the amount of time they devote to their ministry; through the specification of their activities; depending on the background and skills required to undertake the ministries; and according to the setting in which the service is provided. *Ibid.*, 137. It is noteworthy that, for Greek Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas, “it is the ministry that more than anything else renders the Church a *relational* reality, i.e., a mystery of love, reflecting here and now the very life of the Trinitarian God,” which is constantly revealed by way of a *double movement*: (i) as a baptismal movement which renders the Church a community existentially “dead to the world” and hence separated from it, and (ii) as a eucharistic movement which relates to the world by “referring” it to God as *anaphora* and by bringing to it the blessings of God’s life and the taste of the Kingdom to come. It is this double movement of the Church’s relational nature that makes the ministry realise its relational character as a movement of the Church both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. See *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002) 220-1.

<sup>133</sup> Robert L. Kinast, *Caring for Society: A Theological Interpretation of Lay Ministry* (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1985) 61. For Kinast, the experiential meaning of lay ministry encompasses several overlapping and interconnecting feelings ranging from importance to authenticity, from equality to complementarity, from ownership to stewardship. *Ibid.*, 65.

include a “*common* ministry” which does not require ordination or designation, and includes such activities as love of neighbour, evangelisation in one’s own way, and building up the Church according to one’s gifts.<sup>134</sup> For the Cincinnati Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, ministry is “any action of Christian persons which reveals and furthers God’s presence in the world on behalf of the church and at the service of those in need.”<sup>135</sup> Richard McBrien proposes a working definition of ministry based on four different levels, two being Christian in nature, and two having nothing intrinsically to do with religion.<sup>136</sup>

In *Christifideles Laici*, the Apostolic Exhortation promulgated after the Synod on the Laity in 1987, John Paul II observed that there was “a too-indiscriminate use of the word *ministry*,” and stressed the difference between the ministries derived from the sacrament of orders and those derived from the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, teaching that ministries of the lay faithful find their foundation in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation and they should be exercised in keeping with the laity’s secular character.<sup>137</sup> In 1990, John Linnan described ministry as “the public and ecclesially recognized roles of those who in the name of Christ serve the community of believers, assisting them in their efforts to become church, the Body of Christ, so that it can continue the work of Christ in the world.”<sup>138</sup> Like John Linnan, Michael Lawler borrowed key elements of O’Meara’s definition and viewed ministry as “action done in public, on behalf of the church, as a result of a charism of service,

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<sup>134</sup> Sharon A. Ewart, “Council, Code and Laity,” *The Jurist* 47:2 (1987) 496.

<sup>135</sup> Cincinnati Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, “An Expanded View of Ministry,” *Origins* 16:31 (15 January 1987) 553, 555.

<sup>136</sup> These levels of ministry are: (i) General/universal ministry as any service rendered to others, rooted in our humanity, having nothing intrinsically to do with religion; (ii) General/specific ministry as a special service rendered to others, rooted in competence, performed by people who are certified or validated; (iii) Christian/universal ministry as any service rendered to others in Christ and because of Christ, rooted in baptism and confirmation; in this sense every Christian is called to ministry; (iv) Christian/specific ministry as a service rendered in the name of the Church and for the sake of its mission, based on some action of designation by the Church, performed by a small number of Church members. See Richard P. McBrien, *Ministry: A Theological, Pastoral Handbook* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988) 11-4.

<sup>137</sup> John Paul II, “*Christifideles Laici: Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*,” *Origins* 18:35 (9 February 1989) no. 23.

<sup>138</sup> John E. Linnan, “Ministry Since Vatican II: A Time of Change and Growth,” *New Theology Review* 3(1990) 44.

proclaimed, made explicit and celebrated in the church in sacrament, to incarnate in symbol the presence of Christ and of the God whose kingdom he reveals.”<sup>139</sup> In a monumental book published in 1993, Kenan Osborne studies the lay ministry question in the Catholic Church over the two millennia of Christian history, highlighting the importance of a “common matrix for all Christians.”<sup>140</sup> He proposes three concepts to express this matrix of gospel discipleship, a foundational and primordial basis that is rooted in baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist,<sup>141</sup> and precedes any distinction of cleric/lay or cleric/religious/lay: the people of God, *Christifidelis*, and priesthood of all believers.<sup>142</sup> For John Collins, there are two types of ministry: “ministry as lowly *diakonia*” where “by baptism all Christians are called into ministry, which is an ongoing gift of the Spirit,” and “ministry as high *diakonia*” which is a “responsibility laid upon certain individuals within the church who feel called and are called by the church to proclaim the gospel in word and sacrament.”<sup>143</sup>

In a report issued in 1995, the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales understands ministry “as the service based on baptism and confirmation to which all are called. In this sense it overlaps with, and flows into mission. It is the forms of life and activity through which the baptised express their discipleship, in the various areas of their life; home and family; neighbourhood and wider society; parish and diocese.”<sup>144</sup> Across the Atlantic Ocean, the U.S. Catholic bishops issued two documents to explain the vocation, mission, and ministry of the laity as four calls—to holiness, to community, to mission and ministry, and to Christian adulthood/Christian

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<sup>139</sup> Michael G. Lawler, *A Theology of Ministry* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1990) 28; see also Michael G. Lawler and Thomas J. Shanahan, *Church: A Spirited Communion* (Collegeville, Minn., The Liturgical Press, 1995) 64.

<sup>140</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 530-1.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 540-1.

<sup>143</sup> John N. Collins, “A Ministry for Tomorrow’s Church,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 32:2 (Spring 1995) 169.

<sup>144</sup> Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, *The Sign We Give* (Essex, England: Matthew James, 1995) 18.

maturity.<sup>145</sup> In 1997, eight Vatican dicasteries jointly issued an Instruction, approved in *forma specifica* by Pope John Paul II, examining the distinction between the ministry specific to priests and the ministries of lay people, and giving “directives to ensure the effective collaboration of the nonordained faithful...while safeguarding the integrity of the pastoral ministry of priests.”<sup>146</sup> Instead of proposing a definition Zeni Fox suggests five “namings” of ministries: “ministry as sacramental/liturgical, as stewardship of the tradition, as community building, as prophesy and as caring for society.”<sup>147</sup> Reflecting on the diversity of ministries in a postmodern Church, Meyer-

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<sup>145</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity, 1980, Reflections of the U.S. Bishops,” *Origins* (27 November 1980) 369, 371-3; *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), <http://www.nccbuscc.org/laity/calleden.htm> (accessed 7 July 2003). It is of note that in the 1980 statement the U.S. bishops used the term “ecclesial ministers” to describe “lay persons who have prepared for professional ministry in the Church.” In the 1995 pastoral letter, they changed the term to “ecclesial lay ministers,” listing a broad range of their roles such as cantors, music directors, readers, Eucharistic ministers, altar servers, and activities such as teaching young people and adults, serving in peace and justice networks, in soup kitchens and shelters, in marriage preparation, in bereavement programs, and in ministry to the separated and divorced. The bishops affirmed that “all these actions, when performed in the name of Jesus and enacted under the aegis of the Church, are forms of ministry.” *Ibid.*, 10. Avery Dulles notes that the U.S. Bishops’s 1995 document makes a clear distinction between “the two areas of lay activity: their witness and service in secular society and their service to the church, calling only the latter ecclesial lay ministry” (“Can Laity Properly Be Called ‘Ministers’,” *Origins* 35:44 [20 April 2006] 729). In 1999 the U.S. Bishops’ Subcommittee on Lay Ministry issued another report under the title of *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions: A Report of the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on the Laity, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999), this time focusing on lay ecclesial ministry as the new phenomenon of the Church. In 2005 the U.S. bishops revisited the theme, and emphasised the basis of lay ecclesial ministry on both the individual call to ministry and the collective participation in the mission of the Church. See “Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” *Origins* 35:25 (1 December 2005) 405-27. This document provides further clarification: “The ministry is *lay* because it is service done by laypersons. The sacramental basis is the sacraments of initiation, not the sacrament of ordination. The ministry is *ecclesial* because it has a place within the community of the church, whose communion and mission it serves, and because it is submitted to the discernment, authorisation and supervision of the hierarchy. Finally, it is *ministry* because it is a participation in the threefold ministry of Christ, who is priest, prophet and king.” *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>146</sup> Eight Vatican Offices, “Instruction: On Certain Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests,” *Origins* 27 (17 November 1997) 397, 399-411. In a commentary on this document, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger stated its purpose as “to avoid, on the one hand, an undervaluing of the ordained ministry and a falling into a ‘Protestantization’ of the concepts of ministry and even of the Church herself, and, on the other, the risk of a ‘clericalization’ of the laity” (“Unity of the Church’s Mission Involves Diversity of Ministries,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 17 [29 April 1998] 18). Ratzinger warns against “a ‘functionalistic’ conception of the ministry, which sees the ministry of ‘pastor’ as a *function* and not as an *ontological sacramental reality*.” *Ibid.* Edward Hahnenberg observes that “while at points the document helpfully distinguishes different ministerial tasks, its vision of the priest’s sacred ministry is so encompassing that it is hard to imagine any lay activity within the church as anything but a participation in something that properly belongs to the ordained” (“Bishop: Source or Center of Ministerial Life?” *Origins* 37:7 [28 June 2007] 106).

<sup>147</sup> Zeni Fox, *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1997) 225-7.

Wilmes argues that ministries “represent the church in society” and defined them as “public functions in and by which the church articulates its specific understanding of itself.”<sup>148</sup> Opting for simplicity Paul Avis contends that ministry “may be best understood as any work for the church that is recognized by the church.”<sup>149</sup> In a similar vein, John Ford remarks that “the different uses of the term ‘ministry’ reflect the multiplicity of forms that ministry has taken in the twenty centuries of Christianity,” and “underlying the variety in usage of the term, the reality represents a fundamental aspect of Christian belief and life: ministry is service for others in imitation of Christ.”<sup>150</sup>

To conclude our survey of the representative descriptions of the terms “ministry” and “lay ministry,” which often overlap in significant ways, it is fitting to make a distinction between ministry and mission: “the latter pertains to the essence of the Church, the former is one of the Church’s activities, though indispensable for mission.”<sup>151</sup> In this sense, ministry could be seen as “a mission within a mission.”<sup>152</sup> Ministry also tends to be *ad intra*, an involvement in the Church and its growth while *mission* is primarily *ad extra*, an involvement in the world and its transformation.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, “The Diversity of Ministries in a Postmodern Church,” *Concilium* 3 (1999) 70.

<sup>149</sup> Paul Avis, “Ministry,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings et al. (Oxford: University Press, 2000) 437.

<sup>150</sup> John Ford, “Ministries in the Church,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 294.

<sup>151</sup> Christopher O’Donnell, “*Ecclesia*,” *A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 305. Gerard Hall also makes a helpful distinction: “the mission of evangelizing belongs to the whole Church and is the responsibility of all Christians. Ministries, on the other hand, belong to individuals in particular churches. Yet they also exist for, and are expressions of, the Church’s universal mission.... The relationship between the universal Church and the local churches resembles the relationship between mission and ministry: one cannot exist without the other” (“Christian Mission Today,” *Compass* 41:3 [Spring 2007] 5).

<sup>152</sup> James H. Provost, “Ministry: Reflections on Some Canonical Issues,” *The Heythrop Journal* 29 (1988) 291. Neil Ormerod argues that “far from ministry being the central task of the Church, it is mission which defines its purpose.” “Mission and Ministry in the Wake of Vatican II,” *Australian EJournal of Theology* 1 (August 2003), [http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt\\_1](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_1) (accessed 16 March 2004).

<sup>153</sup> John E. Linnan, “Ministry Since Vatican II: A Time of Change and Growth,” *New Theology Review* 3 (1990) 34; Christopher O’Donnell, “*Ecclesia*,” *A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 303.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the laity question in history with an emphasis on theological developments after the Second Vatican Council. It examines in particular Yves Congar's thought on the ministry of lay people, Leonard Doohan's observations on the theological interpretations of lay experience, and the changing meaning of lay ministry. Two conclusions can be drawn from this historical survey. The first is the realisation that there was a definitive change in perspective, initiated by Vatican II, whereby lay people no longer considered themselves to be passive objects of the ministrations of the clergy, but active agents who participate in their own right in the threefold mission of Christ and the Church. The second is the recognition of the existence of a multiplicity of lay ministries in the Church. This ever expanding phenomenon necessitates ongoing theological investigations, which in turn will help to clarify the meaning and scope of lay life and lay mission in the Church and in the world. The various interpretations of the mission and ministry of lay people discussed in this chapter will serve as the context for a detailed exposition and evaluation of the FABC's theology of laity in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. But, to gain a full and systematic understanding of this rich and dynamic theology we will proceed first with a study of the theological methodologies of the bishops of Asia. And, this is our aim in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGIES OF THE FABC

#### 3.1 Introduction

For Karl Rahner the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) marked the beginning of the Church's "official self-realization as a world Church."<sup>1</sup> In his view there were three great epochs in Church history. The first one was a short period of Jewish Christianity, followed by the second, much longer period of the Church in a particular cultural group, namely of Hellenism and European culture and civilisation. With Vatican II the Church has entered into the third period where the Church's living space is the whole world, and has begun the transition from a Western Church to a universal Church.<sup>2</sup> Rahner contends that this caesura or break in the history of the Church can be compared to the opening up of the primitive Church to the Gentiles, and presents many challenges for the integration of non-Western cultures.<sup>3</sup> His world-Church vision suggests an ecclesiology that places emphasis on the local Church. In his words, "a world-church as it exists outside Europe cannot simply import and imitate the life-style, law, liturgy and theology of the European church. In all these

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) 717; "Die bleibende Bedeutung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," *Stimmen der Zeit* 197 (1979) 796. Following Tissa Balasuriya, Paul J. Roy contests Rahner's thesis, and argues that the Council was a largely Eurocentric body, which did not reflect the concerns of the peoples of the third world. See "The Developing Sense of Community," in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda*, edited by Lucien Richard, Daniel T. Harrington and John W. O'Malley, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 201. For Balasuriya, Vatican II was "inadequate for the Asian context, and therefore also for the world context," because, being "a Euro-American council," its concerns were "mainly intraecclesiastical and interecclesiastical (ecumenical) vis-à-vis other Christian churches" (Planetary Theology [London: SCM Press, 1984] 148-9). He noted that some of the main theologians of the council—Congar, Rahner, Ratzinger, Küng—rendered valuable service as far as they went, but their experience was European and church-centered." Ibid., 148.

<sup>2</sup> Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theological Investigations* 20 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 83.

<sup>3</sup> Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) 723-4. Rahner emphasises that "this is the issue: either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a world Church and with Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II." Ibid., 724.



respects the churches must be independent and culturally firmly rooted in their own countries.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, with Vatican II the global character of the Church was underscored. It emerges as a worldwide community of faith made up of local Churches,<sup>5</sup> each of which is involved in a different cultural and social context. Such a sense of the Church in turn affects theology and its methods. One of these is the growing need for a contextual theology that takes into account human experience and the specific realities of cultures and social changes as these affect both the life of the Church and theological reflection upon it. The more the Church becomes the world Church, the more varied Christianity will become, and the more contextualised theology will be. Christian theology is and has been contextual by definition,<sup>6</sup> but since the event of

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<sup>4</sup> Rahner, “The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future,” in *Theological Investigations* 20 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 110-1.

<sup>5</sup> In this thesis we use the term “local Church” in preference to “particular Church,” to refer to a national Church, grouping of Churches, diocese, parish or small Christian communities. Our view is different from Ladislaus Orsy who suggests that “local church has a geographical connotation and tends to point to a parish or to a diocese, hardly to more than these. The term ‘particular’ allows greater flexibility; it points toward the natural unity of a group of Christians inside the broad universal community. Such unity may well emerge in a diocese, but it may well go beyond it or extend as far as an ecclesiastical province, a region, or a country. It may even spread over several countries” (“A Theology of the Local Church and Religious Life,” *Review for Religious* 36 [1977] 667). The usage of these terms is not consistent across official Church documents. Statistically Vatican II documents use “diocese” more than “particular Church.” Half of the twenty-four occurrences of the term “particular Church” in the conciliar documents refer to the diocese with the rest to organic groupings of Churches such as rites. “Local Church” is used eight times to refer to the diocese, the parish or groupings of Churches. The Council’s expression of “particular Church” has a wider meaning than that adopted by the 1983 Code of Canon Law, which restricts the usage of the term to the diocese. The Code does not use the terms “local Church” and “universal Church.” See Theological Advisory Commission, *Theses on the Local Church: a Theological Reflection in the Asian Context*, FAPC Papers no. 60 (Hong Kong: FABC Secretariat, 1991) 9-11; Sabbas J. Kilian, “The Meaning and Nature of the Local Church,” *CTSA Proceedings* 35 (1980) 244-55; Joseph A. Komonchak, “Ministry and the Local Church,” *CTSA Proceedings* 36 (1981) 56; Leonard Doohan, *Laity’s Mission in the Church: Setting a New Direction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) 26-7; *The Jurist* 52:1 (1992) 295-7. Henri de Lubac contends that the criterion for the identity of a particular Church (i.e., a diocese) is theological while the criterion of a local Church is socio-cultural (Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church: Followed by Particular Churches in the Universal Church and an Interview Conducted by Gwendoline Jarczyk*; translated by Sr. Sergia Englund [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982] 193-5). However, for the English Language Group’s discussion on the meaning of “local Church” at the International Colloquium on “Local Church and Catholicity” held in Salamanca, Spain from 2-7 April 1991, the difference between the two terms is encountered in their diverse matrices: “While the principal matrix of the word ‘local’ expresses the notion of place, the word ‘particular’ is centered on social, historical, and cultural aspects.” *The Jurist* 52:1 (1992) 296-7.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 69.

Vatican II there has been a much greater emphasis on a plurality of theologies,<sup>7</sup> and a keener realisation of the need for a contextual theology that takes into account, or even as a starting point, human experience and contextual realities as resources for theological reflection. Regional and local Churches, including those in Asia, have been developing their theologies from their own cultural, social, and religious situations.<sup>8</sup> In his classic work on *Method in Theology*, Bernard Lonergan contends that “theology is an ongoing process mediating between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix.”<sup>9</sup> It is concerned with the effective communication of Christ’s message while such communication presupposes that preachers and teachers enlarge their horizons to include an “understanding of the culture and the language of the people they address.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, theology can be defined as *fides quaerens intellectum* in terms of a local context.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Continuing the debate of the so-called “*Annales*” school on the meaning of the term “event,” and the relationship between *longue durée* and *événement*, Joseph Komonchak explores the theme of “Vatican II as ‘Event’,” *Theology Digest* 46:4 (Winter 1999) 337-352, making a distinction between “event, experience, and final documents.” In his view, “‘Experience’ refers to contemporary intentions, motives, encounters, decisions, and actions during the Council; the ‘final documents’ are the product of that experience.” “Event” represents a different category, in the sense of a “noteworthy” occurrence, one that has consequences. He concurs with most of the literature on the subject that an “event” represents novelty, discontinuity, a “rupture,” a break from routine, causing surprise, disturbance, even trauma, and perhaps initiating a new routine, a new realm of the taken-for-granted. Reflecting on the controversy surrounding the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council as continuity or discontinuity with the tradition, John W. O’Malley argues that “recent emphasis on the continuity of Vatican II with the Catholic tradition runs the danger of slighting the aspects of the council that were discontinuous. Among those aspects are the literary genre the council adopted and the vocabulary inherent in the genre, different from that of all previous councils” (“Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?” *Theological Studies* 67 [2006] 3).

<sup>8</sup> For Robert Schreiter, contextual theologies arose because universal theologies, largely practised in the academy, did not address the most pressing issues in many local situations, such as “the burden of poverty and oppression, the struggle to create a new identity after a colonial past, or the question of how to meet the challenge of modernity ...” (*The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997] 1).

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) xi.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>11</sup> Tony Kelly suggests that “the context is something that has to be at once discovered and created, as a more global theological context already in existence doubles back on itself to integrate, however dialectically, our particular context into its framework. In this way, the hitherto voiceless can become participants in a larger conversation, and unknown or neglected historical experiences become part of the data. We are never starting from scratch; but faith, endowed with its millennial traditions and historical experience of many cultures, seeks understanding, integration and expression, now, in this particular context” (“Whither ‘Australian Theology’? A Response to Geoffrey Lilburne,” *Pacifica* 12 [June 1999] 196). This suggestion flows from his earlier exploration of the theme of theology as “Christian faith making new connections” (*An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections* [Newtown, NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1993] ix).

The FABC's theology, viewed over a thirty-one-year period from 1970 to 2001, has been a development of great significance for the Churches in Asia, paralleling the more comprehensive event of the Second Vatican Council in its import for the whole Church. This chapter begins with a discussion of the imperative of theological contextualisation using Raimundo Panikkar's distinction between *traditum* and *tradendum*,<sup>12</sup> and a summary of Stephen Bevans' models of contextual theology. After a brief review of the Asian context, it presents the contextual methodologies of the FABC's theology,<sup>13</sup> and highlights its distinctive features. This chapter suggests that the FABC's theology is best understood in terms of the synthetic contextual model according to Stephen Bevans, and argues that it has in fact initiated a paradigm shift, based on Hans Küng's hermeneutical framework, in response to the growing crisis inherent in the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*. The chapter concludes that the FABC's theology is a contextual theology par excellence, a faith seeking both understanding and triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia.

### **3.2 From *Traditum* to *Tradendum*: the Imperative of Theological Contextualisation**

Contextualisation of theology or of the Gospel is not a new reality as theology is always contextually conditioned.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the centuries Christians have lived

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<sup>12</sup> In this chapter "contextualisation" is used in preference to "inculturation." For Robert Schreiter, these two terms are often used interchangeably, but contextualisation is "the most widely used term in Roman Catholic circles to describe the proper relation between faith and cultures," and it has "the advantage of emphasizing the importance of context." See "Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 747.

<sup>13</sup> The Consensus Paper of a workshop on "Local Churches and the Tasks of Mission: Inculturation," part of the International Congress on Mission held in Manila in 1979 to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of this diocese, recommends that "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." See International Congress on Mission, art. 19.c., *FAPA Vol. 1*, 140.

<sup>14</sup> Krikor Halebian contends that it is more correct or proper to speak of contextualisation of the Gospel than the contextualisation of theology as theology is always contextually conditioned. "The Problem of Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 11:1 (January 1983) 95. According to Shoki Coe, contextualisation suggests "a variegated theology," and "is 'future-oriented' in that it is concerned with the gospel in relation to social change and the historical question." See "Contextualization as the Way Toward Reform," in *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, edited by Douglas J. Elwood (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980) 48. Jacques Dupuis notes that "it est devenu coutumier aujourd'hui d'appeler *contextualisation*; le modèle théologique auquel il donne lieu se nommera *théologie herméneutique*" ("Méthode théologique et théologies locales:

and witnessed to the values of the Gospel in different cultural, religious, social, political, and economic contexts. Contextualising theology can occur along four fronts: “as an ongoing process in Christendom; at the frontiers of mission, where the church meets other cultures; specifically in the encounter with other religions; and in the interpretation of the Bible.”<sup>15</sup> On the second and third fronts especially, the Church has to face different worldviews and is compelled to reflect on the relationship between the Christian faith and human culture, and between tradition and social change. The Church also has to constantly review the entire tradition both in terms of content and as a historical communication. Tradition as the *traditum* is what is handed on, and it is not context-free. Tradition as the *tradendum* is what should be transmitted, in a way that addresses a particular context.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, in this chapter *traditum* means the deposit of faith that must be received, safeguarded and transmitted in all its integrity. On the other hand, the term *tradendum* implies the duty to communicate the Christian message in a manner that is deliberately sensitive to the cultural, historical, religious and social contexts of the

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adaptation, inculturation, contextualisation,” *Seminarium* 32:1 [1992] 69). He goes on to explain this method as follows: “c’est partir du contexte concret dans lequel l’Eglise vit sa foi et interpréter le vécu en fonction de message évangélique.” Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Charles R. Taber, “Contextualization,” *Religious Studies Review* 13:1 (January 1987) 33. For Jose M. De Mesa, “contextual theology is the doing of theology with keen awareness of contextuality,” and “contextuality connotes a number of things”: *attentiveness* (by listening to the cry of the poor and the Holy Spirit), *intentional rootedness* (in the cultural, religious, historical, social situations, and the gender of people), *conditioning* (i.e., conscious of being affected by the context in which theology is done), *transforming* (by responding to the demands of the context and aiming to alter “conditions in the Church and in society that are counter to the deep intent of the Gospel”), and *inclusivity* (by endeavouring “to include voices which have been excluded in the participative process of theologising”). See “Contextual Theologizing: Future Perspectives,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 40:3 (2003) 272.

<sup>16</sup> We owe this distinction to Raimundo Panikkar who associates *traditum* with the “burden of the past” and *tradendum* with the “challenge of the future.” See *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, revised and enlarged edition (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 1, 20. However Panikkar, who admits that he has “not always made the necessary clarifications and distinctions,” uses *traditum* and *tradendum* in a different sense. See *ibid.*, 15. In this seminal work, he appears to use *traditum* to refer to a religion or doctrinal formulations, which are “necessarily limited by cultural factors,” of a more universal truth, and *tradendum* to mean the “living Presence” of the ultimate “Mystery which Christians call Christ.” *Ibid.*, 2, 4, 7. For him, the universally valid truth is “an existential truth, not a mere doctrine,” and hence “non-objectifiable.” *Ibid.*, 9, 11, 21. *Traditum* seems to mean a “conception of Christ” that Christians bring to other people and religions while *tradendum* refers to the “‘Unknown Christ’,” who “remains unknown and yet continues to be Christ.” *Ibid.*, 30.

intended audience.<sup>17</sup> *Traditum*, therefore, refers to the *what* of the *depositum fidei*, and *tradendum* suggests the *why* and *how*. There is a hermeneutical endeavour within both the *traditum* and the *tradendum*. Consequently, contextual theology is an ongoing process of interpreting the *traditum* and the *tradendum* in reference to the promises, needs, and possibilities of a particular cultural situation, in creative fidelity to Scripture and tradition.

Addressing an international ecumenical symposium held at the University of Tübingen, David Tracy argues that “theology as hermeneutical can be described as the attempt to develop mutually critical correlations in theory and praxis between an interpretation of the Christian tradition and an interpretation of the contemporary situation.”<sup>18</sup> In his view, theologians have the task of “rendering as explicit as possible an interpretation of the central Christian message for a concrete situation....”<sup>19</sup> Each theologian, he contends, must “interpret both ‘constants’ (the ‘present world of experience in all its ambivalence, contingency and change’ and the ‘Judaean-Christian tradition, which is ultimately based on the Christian message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ’).”<sup>20</sup> Following Tracy’s suggestion, *traditum* refers to the Judaean-Christian tradition whose core is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, while *tradendum* is concerned with transmitting the Gospel faith in the present world of experience in all its ambivalence, contingency, and change.

Theologising, therefore, requires contextualising the gospel by taking into account the cultural, historical, political, and social contexts in which people live and experience the transcendent. It is not simply the case of *id quod traditum est, id quod traditur*. It is clear then that contextualisation is both an essential condition for theological

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<sup>17</sup> John W. O’Malley observes that “tradition is faithfully passed on only when it is rendered engaging and life-giving” (Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?” *Theological Studies* 67 [2006] 9).

<sup>18</sup> David Tracy, “Some Concluding Reflections on the Conference: Unity Amidst Diversity and Conflict,” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 462.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> David Tracy, “Hermeneutical Reflections in the New Paradigm,” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 35.

thinking,<sup>21</sup> and an imperative for theological integrity.<sup>22</sup> This is particularly true in contemporary Asia. This vast continent is a mosaic of cultures and religions, as well as being, at times, a theatre of bloody conflicts in the midst of the massive poverty of its population. In this context, the FABC has endeavoured to draw on the fountain of *traditum*, and search for a *tradendum* to communicate to the Asian people. To understand and promote this process, let us now turn to the works of Stephen Bevans.

### 3.3 Models of Contextual Theology according to Stephen Bevans

Stephen Bevans describes contextual theology as the process of doing theology that takes into account four factors: the spirit and message of the gospel, the tradition of the Christian people, the culture in which one is theologising, and social change in that culture, whether brought about by Western technological progress or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice, and liberation.<sup>23</sup> He then proposes five models of contextual theologies, depicted in a theological map (Figure 1), and provides a description of each one in relation to the polarities of culture and social change on the one hand, and the Gospel message and Christian tradition on the other.<sup>24</sup> The relative

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<sup>21</sup> Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 21.

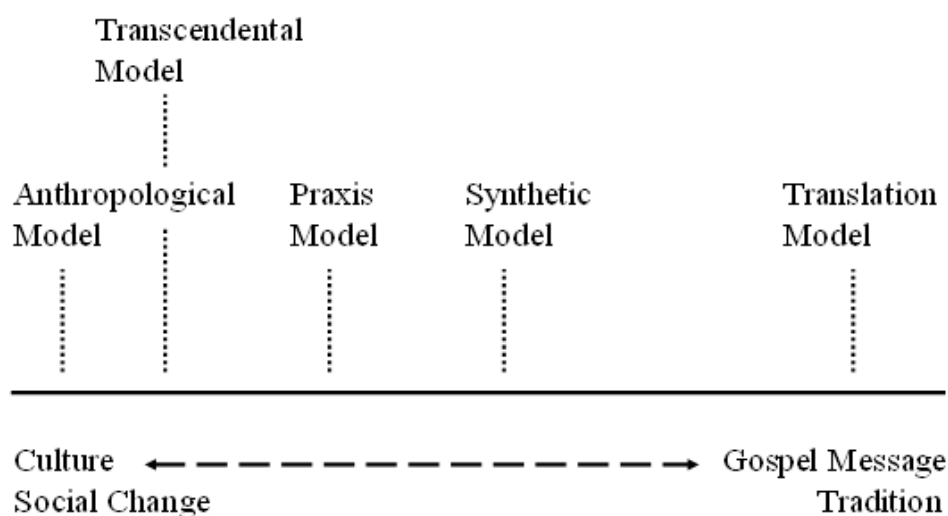
<sup>22</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992) 1.

<sup>23</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 1. In the revised and expanded edition of 2002, he speaks of “context” rather than “culture”, and considers that “contextual theology is done when the experience of the past” (“recorded in scripture and preserved and defended in tradition”) “engages the present context” (individual and social experience, secular or religious culture, social location, and social change”). See *Models of Contextual Theology*, revised and expanded edition, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) xvi-xvii.

<sup>24</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 27. Bevans includes a sixth model, the semiotic model, in an earlier paper, “Models of Contextual Theology,” *Missiology: An International Review* 13:2 (April 1985) 185-202. This semiotic model is subsumed into the synthetic model in the 1992 book. He adds a new model, the countercultural model (not shown in Figure 1) in the revised and expanded edition published in 2002, and places it on the extreme right of the continuum as for him “its concern is to challenge the context with the content of scripture and tradition” (*Models of Contextual Theology*, revised and expanded edition, [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002] 32, 117-37). Robert Schreiter has a similar insight stating that the relation of theology to context, “construed as culture, social structure, or social location,” is “one of intimacy and distance at the same time,” that is, theology must “be rooted in the context, yet be able also to take stock of the context at the same time” (*The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997] 4-5.) As the primary focus of this chapter is to discuss the FABC’s theological methodologies, we prefer to use the 1992 map of models of contextual theology as it provides ample data for our discussion. As to the revised and expanded edition, Bevans notes that “besides a few style changes, updating bibliography and biographical information,” he has “changed very little in most of the text” of the 1992 edition. See *ibid.*, xvi.

position of each model is determined by its leaning toward either of these two poles. Their use is also determined by the different ways they combine the four factors present in any contextual theology. It should be noted that Bevans does not consider that these models are mutually exclusive; nor do they constitute five different paths to contextual theology.<sup>25</sup> Keeping this in mind, let us take up each in turn.

### A Map of Models of Contextual Theology



Source: Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992) 27.

Figure 1.

The translation model is the first and most conservative of the five. It places more emphasis on fidelity to the theological sources of Scripture and tradition in its insistence that the message of the Gospel is unchanging.<sup>26</sup> Its presupposition is that the essential message of Christianity is supracultural. Proponents of this model tend to distinguish between the kernel of the Gospel and the husk of culture: an essential, supracultural Christian message can be separated from a nonessential, disposable

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>26</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 30-46.

cultural expression.<sup>27</sup> The contextualising process starts with stripping the Christian message from its cultural wrappings, usually its Western cultural husk. Once the pure Gospel is identified, it can be rewrapped, as it were, in a particular cultural husk for communication to the intended recipients. In this approach, culture plays an ancillary role, subordinate to the unchanging Gospel message. Hence any conflicts between the values of the Gospel and those of the cultures will be resolved in favour of the Gospel values which must be preserved. The Gospel in this view is the judge of all cultures, which are vehicles of the Gospel message. Thus the model presupposes that revelation is culturally free; that the Christian message brings something that is totally new into a culture; and that all cultures inherently have the same basic structures.

The anthropological model, on the other hand, takes human culture as the starting point.<sup>28</sup> It focuses on the validity of the human as the place of divine revelation as a theological *locus* on a par with the other sources of Scripture and tradition. This model is primarily concerned to preserve and promote an authentic Christian cultural identity. To this end, it emphasises the dignity of the human person, the structure of human community, and the value of culture in its use of anthropological insights. In this regard, God's revelation is viewed not as a separate supracultural message but as a stimulus to meaning and value found in the midst of human life, and in the relationships that constitute social existence. The anthropological model has a creation-centred orientation. It acknowledges God's presence as revealed in the different cultural contexts, which affect both the content, understanding, and presentation of the word of God.<sup>29</sup> Necessarily, this model is also open to insights

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Schreier highlights the image of kernel and husk: "the basic Christian revelation is the kernel; the previous cultural settings in which it has been incarnated constitute the husk. The kernel has to be hulled time and again, as it were, to allow it to be translated into new cultural contexts." See *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985) 7.

<sup>28</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 47-62. According to Stephen Bevens, classical theology is a reflection on the two *loci theologici* of scripture and tradition, and "contextual theology realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms, and so forth, are to be considered, along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression." See his *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992) 1-2. The terms "*loci theologici*" were made classical by Melchior Cano in *De locis theologicis*, published in 1563. See J. Thornhill, "*Loci Theologici*," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: The Catholic University of America, 1967) 950.

<sup>29</sup> Bevens explains that a creation-centered theology is based on the conviction that "culture and human experience are generally good," and grace can build on nature, in contrast to a redemption-centered theology, according to which grace cannot be understood as perfecting nature as human experience and culture are "either in need of a radical transformation or in need of a total replacement." In his view, in



gleaned from interreligious dialogues as material from which to develop a culturally sensitive theology.

Thirdly, there is Bevans' praxis model of contextual theology.<sup>30</sup> It highlights the importance of social development, for the interpretation of the Gospel and articulation of faith cannot be politically or economically neutral. It is especially associated with political theology,<sup>31</sup> particularly the theology of liberation,<sup>32</sup> in the recognition that God's saving action is at work not only in the matrix of culture but also in the dynamics of history. Revelation is therefore related to the recognition of God's presence in history, in social, economic and political structures, in the struggle against every form of oppression, as in the events of everyday life. The truth of the Gospel is not primarily on the level of theory, but in the praxis of historical conduct. In contrast to the previously elaborated models, this model is concerned with the promotion of the cultural and social change. In this sense, all believers, not merely theologians, are engaged and called to know the truth by doing it.<sup>33</sup> We know God best by doing God's saving will, and by uniting ourselves with God's saving action.

A fourth model, which Bevans calls synthetic, aims to incorporate the best insights of the three previously described models.<sup>34</sup> As the "both/and" process, it is intent on

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a creation-centred approach, "human experience, current events, and culture would be areas of God's activity and therefore sources of theology." See Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 16-7.

<sup>30</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 63-80.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Eicher notes that "since 1968 there has been a proliferation of new political theology. This theology has criticized the bourgeois religion of European industrial society. Enlightened political theology invokes the memory of the coming kingdom of the crucified Lord of history and critically unmask[s] the merciless injustice of national and international states" ("The Church as Contrast Society," *Theology Digest* 35:2 [Summer 1988] 139). He quotes Cardinal Lorscheider's pregnant statement that "'there is no theology that is not politically involved'." Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> For Gustavo Gutiérrez, "the theology of liberation is reflection on practice in the light of faith" ("The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, edited by Christopher Rowland [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999] 27. Wolfgang Schürger observes that "liberation theology is contextual theology, lived theology, capable of change and adaptation to new challenges and situations" ("Reading the Bible in Latin America," *Theology Digest* 53:2 [Summer 2006] 145); its goal "in reading the Bible is to hear God's word in daily life," because God, according to Carlos Mesters, "has written two books: the one is the book of life and the other is the Bible." Ibid., 143.

<sup>33</sup> Jon Sobrino, quoted in Alfred T. Hennelly, "Theological Method: The Southern Exposure," *Theological Studies* 38:4 (December 1977) 724.

<sup>34</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 81-96.

keeping the integrity of the traditional message, and at the same time, taking seriously culture and social change. In a creative and dynamic dialectic, it promotes an ongoing dialogue between faith and cultures by accepting that every culture or context, though unique in its way, still contains elements common to all. Dialogue, complementarity, and transcultural communication are the key factors.

Bevans' fifth model is described as transcendental.<sup>35</sup> Its focus is not on the content to be articulated but on the articulating subject. Genuine theology is possible only when it emerges from authentically converted subjects, from those who allow God to touch and transform their life. Thus, the starting point of this model is transcendental as it shifts from the world of objects to the world of subjects, into the interior world of human persons in their conscious experience of both God and themselves. In this way, theology is a process of self-objectification, rather than a detached objective content. The believing and knowing subject is intimately involved in determining reality. This model presupposes the universal structure of human knowing and responsibility. Consequently, it enables the Christian to come to self-appropriation in the light of God's Word, within the larger world of human experience. In this sense, the best agents of contextual theology are those who have been radically transformed in their deepest subjectivity, as they live and act in their differing religious and cultural contexts.

According to Bevans, each of the above five models is valid. Collectively, they offer a range of methodological options for theologising. Each model will operate more adequately within certain sets of circumstances. Underlying this flexible commitment to contextual theology is the recognition that theological pluralism is desirable in a world of cultural differences, especially in Asia, home to a multitude of cultures and religions. Theology is after all an interpretation of the Gospel for the Church's life in society, and this is what the FABC has endeavoured to do in the particular context of Asia. The following section will provide a *tour d'horizon* of the Asian context highlighting its realities, issues, and challenges.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 97-110.

### 3.4 The Asian Context: Realities, Issues, and Challenges

Most of the statements issued by the FABC begin with a discussion of the contextual realities in Asia.<sup>36</sup> Together these documents depict Asia as a continent of change and crisis, pregnant with difficulties but also showing increasing signs of hope. Right from its first meeting in 1970, prior to the official establishment of the FABC, the Asian bishops observed that Asia, a continent of ancient cultures and religions, home to “almost two-thirds of mankind,” is marked by poverty, and scarred by war and suffering.<sup>37</sup> Nearly 60 percent of its people are under twenty-five years of age.<sup>38</sup> With the demise of colonialism, Asian nations have endeavoured to seek and affirm their identity, and the poor masses have expected a better life for themselves.<sup>39</sup> The First Plenary Meeting of the FABC (1974) recognises that there is a “swift and far-reaching transformation,” in Asia, a continent “undergoing modernisation, social change, secularisation and the breakup of traditional societies.”<sup>40</sup> In the Second Plenary Assembly (1978) the bishops express a concern that the modern world threatens traditional values and this situation brings to the Church a true crisis.<sup>41</sup> In the following Plenary Assembly (1982) they see signs of hope and signs of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> The Fourth Plenary Assembly (1986) stresses the need to confront “the dark realities in the heart of Asia” which are associated with “misguided and selfish power politics,” and it highlights the plight of the youth and

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<sup>36</sup> Except the statement of the Third Plenary Assembly, which commences with a discussion of the ecclesiology of the Asian Church. See FABC III, arts. 6-8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55-7. For a succinct summary of Asia’s realities, not in a chronological progression as presented in this chapter, but under its demographic, economic, social, political, and religious aspects, see Peter C. Phan, “Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. in Dialogue with Asian Theologians: What Can They Learn from Each Other?” *Horizons* 32:1 (Spring 2005) 66-7; see also *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Asian Bishops’ Meeting, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 6. See also FABC IV (1986) art. 3.2.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 181; FABC V (1990), art. 2.2.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 277.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> FABC I, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> FABC II, arts. 8-9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 30-31.

<sup>42</sup> FABC III, arts. 10-13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 59.

women.<sup>43</sup> It affirms that “the Asian family is the cellular receptacle of all Asia’s problems, poverty, repression, exploitation and degradation, divisions and conflicts.”<sup>44</sup> The Fifth Plenary Assembly (1990) raises concerns at the change caused by globalisation, continuing injustice, discrimination against women and the bleak future of young people.<sup>45</sup> The Sixth Plenary Assembly (1995) begins with a quick scan of Asian realities, retrieving the analyses of previous plenary assemblies, this time emphasising “whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes, and destroys the life of individuals, groups or people.”<sup>46</sup> Finally, in the Seventh Plenary Assembly (2000) the Asian bishops review in broad strokes problems associated with economic globalisation, authoritarian states coupled with rampant corruption, the rise of fundamentalism, the deterioration of the environment, and the increasing militarisation of societies.<sup>47</sup>

Despite all the dark realities signs of hope are emerging, and Asia remains “the context of God’s creative, incarnational, and redemptive action, the theatre in which the drama of Asia’s salvation is enacted.”<sup>48</sup> The poor and marginalised of Asia become more recognised, conscious of their human dignity, and do not accept that the situation they are in is an inevitable fate, but “something to be struggled against.”<sup>49</sup> There are movements for democracy and human rights, women’s movements and ecological movements, and people become more committed to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> FABC IV, arts 3.0.1-3.3.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179-84.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.4.1.

<sup>45</sup> FABC V, arts. 2.1-2.2.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275-77.

<sup>46</sup> FABC VI, arts. 6-7, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> FABC VII, Part II, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 6-8.

<sup>48</sup> FABC V, art. 1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275.

<sup>49</sup> FABC V, art. 2.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 277; FABC VI, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> FAPA V, arts. 2.0-2.3.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275-279; FABC VI, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 4.

The Christian Church continues to face many problems, which are due to a triple marginalisation: Christianity as a minority religion in Asia,<sup>51</sup> the local Church perceived as a *corpus alienum* planted by Western missionaries on Asian soil,<sup>52</sup> and the universal Church seen to maintain an attitude of superiority towards other religions.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the FABC is committed to the emergence of the Asianness of the Church in Asia by trying to be an “embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially interiority, harmony, [and] a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life.”<sup>54</sup> Only then can the Church become a “Church of Asia,” not simply a “Church in Asia,” and will it no longer be considered as an “alien presence.”<sup>55</sup> The Asian vision, which the FABC has developed over the past thirty years, consists of eight movements: first, “a movement towards a Church of the Poor and a Church of the Young” [Asian Bishops’ Meeting, 1970]; second, “a movement toward a ‘truly

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<sup>51</sup> Christians account for approximately 3.9% of the total population of Asia with Catholics representing about 2.8%, concentrated mainly in the Philippines (83% of the population), South Korea, Vietnam, and East Timor. See *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2003* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2003) 638, 780, 801, 828, 857.

<sup>52</sup> OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the context of Evangelization, Dialogue and Proclamation,” art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 195.

<sup>53</sup> During his visit to India in 1999, where “only 2.4% of Indians are Christians,” John Paul II inflamed local tensions “by openly calling for conversion of Asia to Catholicism” saying that the continent is “thirsting for the living water that Jesus alone can give.” See Asiaweek, “Editorials: Planting the Cross: The Pope Has Hurt Christianity’s Cause in India,” *Asiaweek* (26 November 1999) 18; see also John Paul II, “*Ecclesia in Asia*,” *Origins* 29:23 (18 November 1999) 382. This negative reaction was in marked contrast with “a memorable symbolic gesture” that he made when he fell “on his knees in prayer at Raj Ghat of New Delhi, the *samadhi* that honours the memory of Mahatma Gandhi.” Vidyajyoti, “Editorial: Pope John Paul II,” *Vidyajyoti* 67:10 (October 2003) 819. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, once described Buddhism as “un autoérotisme spirituel, en quelque sorte” (Michel Cool, “Le Testament du Panzerkardinal,” *L’Express* [20 March 1997] 70). His office’s declaration *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* generated headlines in both Catholic and secular press. See *The Tablet* (18 November 2000), *America* (28 October 2000). *The Washington Post* ran a headline, “Vatican Claims Church Monopoly on Salvation,” while the *Los Angeles Times*’s banner read, “Salvation that Reopens the Door to Intolerance.” See R. Jeffrey Smith, “Vatican Claims Church Monopoly on Salvation; Move Confounds Backers of Ecumenical Dialogue,” *The Washington Post* (6 September 2000) A13, and Gary Greenebaum and Robert Guffey Ellerson, “Salvation That Reopens the Door to Intolerance,” *Los Angeles Times* (17 September 2000) M2, M6. Greenebaum and Ellerson wonder if the Catholic Church’s intentions are “still colored by supersessionism, the long-held belief that Christianity supplanted Judaism, rendering it forever spiritually unfulfilled?” (Ibid., M2). For more details on the reactions to the document, both within and outside the Catholic Church, see for instance, Richard P. McBrien, “*Dominus Iesus: An Ecclesiological Critique*” (available on [www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org), accessed 28 March 2003), and Douglas Clark, “*Dominus Iesus: The Document and the ‘Spin’*,” *The Living Light* 376:3 (Spring 2001) 41-6;

<sup>54</sup> FABC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> BIRA IV/12, art. 50, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 333.

local Church” [FABC I, 1974]; third, “a movement toward deep interiority” [FABC II, 1978]; fourth, “a movement toward an authentic community of faith” [FABC III, 1982]; fifth, “a movement toward active integral evangelization, toward a new sense of mission” [FABC V, 1990]; sixth, “a movement toward empowerment of men and women” [FABC IV, 1986]; seventh, “a movement toward active involvement in generating and serving life” [FABC VI, 1995]; eighth, “a movement toward the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with the cultures.”<sup>56</sup>

The challenge for the Asian Church is “to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities,”<sup>57</sup> and to “work for justice and peace along with the Christians of other churches, with people of other faiths, and with all the people of good will, to make the Kingdom of God more visibly present in Asia.”<sup>58</sup> The FABC has also endeavoured to motivate the Church of Asia towards a new way of being Church, a Church that is committed to becoming a community of communities, and a credible sign of salvation and liberation.<sup>59</sup> At the Seventh Plenary Assembly, the FABC committed itself to direct its mission of love and service to the youth, women, the family, indigenous peoples, sea-based and land-based migrants, and refugees.<sup>60</sup> Facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Asian bishops acknowledge that they are addressing “needs that are massive and increasingly complex,” and they recognise the “need to feel and act ‘integrally’,” “in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters, and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths.”<sup>61</sup> For the Asian bishops, “inculturation, dialogue, justice and the option for the poor” are aspects of whatever they do.<sup>62</sup> These Asian realities, issues, and challenges are the context in which the Church lives and

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<sup>56</sup> FABC VII, art. I.A, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 3-4.

<sup>57</sup> FABC V, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275.

<sup>58</sup> FABC V, art. 2.3.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279.

<sup>59</sup> FABC VI, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> FABC VII, Part III.A.1-5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> FABC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

theology is done in Asia today. In this Asian context, the Church is called to a renewed evangelisation, which requires “a new expression, renewed methods and a renewed fervor.”<sup>63</sup>

### 3.5 Theological Methodologies of the FABC

Since their first meeting in 1970, the bishops of Asia have consistently followed a contextual approach to theological reflection, “taking into account contextual realities as resources of theology.”<sup>64</sup> They draw a distinction between “sources” and “resources” of theology: Christian sources refer to Scripture and tradition, and contextual realities are called theological resources.<sup>65</sup> The FABC has employed “the same method in its many conferences and seminars—to start from the analysis of the real situation in its many facets and to base its faith-reflections on the data thus perceived.”<sup>66</sup> This consistent pattern has been evident in the plenary assembly statements, the position papers, and the various study institutes and workshops organised by the FABC offices. Here we will examine the FABC’s contextual theological methodologies gleaned from the structure of plenary assembly statements and the passages in the FABC documents that deal explicitly with the subject.

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<sup>63</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” art. 51, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226. Here the Asian bishops simply repeated a statement made four years earlier by Pope John Paul II when he called for a new evangelisation on the American continent and throughout the world, which would be “new in its zeal, in its methods, in its expression.” See John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter to Latin American Religious on the Occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World,” *Origins* 20:13 (6 September 1990) 209. The Pope had said the same thing on 9 March 1983 in an address to the council of Latin American bishops in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. See footnote 1, *ibid.*, 216.

<sup>64</sup> OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” arts. 3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 355. For a helpful discussion of the Asian context as sources and resources of theology, see Peter C. Phan, “Theology on the Other Side of the Borders: Responding to the Signs of the Times,” *CTSA Proceedings* 57 (2002) 98-102.

<sup>65</sup> OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” arts. 3.1-3.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 355-64. these contextual realities include the cultures and religions of peoples, social movements, women’s movements, tribal and ecological movements, peoples’ movements for human rights, the stories of poor and oppressed people, the economic, social, and political realities, world events, the longings of people for dignity, freedom, life, and solidarity, in short, the totality of life; *ibid.*, 356.

<sup>66</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 1.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 233.

### 3.5.1 “See, Judge, Act” Process

Of the many documents issued by the FABC, the plenary assembly statements have the highest authority. Each of these statements shows how the Asian bishops confront various contextual issues and propose action plans based on their analysis of the situations, and their interpretation and application of Christian sources and magisterial teachings. Analysing the final statements of the first three plenary assemblies, A.J.V. Chandrakanthan asserts that “a conspicuous lack of methodology is a serious deficiency in almost all the statements of the plenary assembly.”<sup>67</sup> One would tend to agree with this contention if by methodology he means a formal, structured theological process, akin to the elaborate method proposed by Bernard Lonergan.<sup>68</sup> However, a detailed analysis of these statements and other documents that were subsequently issued by the FABC, shows that the Asian bishops have never intended to develop a systematic method of theology. Their approach is, and has always been, primarily pastoral and missionary. They analyse contextual realities with constant reference to Scripture and tradition, aiming to respond to the needs of Asian Christians, and to interpret and devise ways to fulfil the evangelising mission of the Church in Asia.<sup>69</sup> They do not set out to face this enormous challenge by adopting or

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<sup>67</sup> A.J.V. Chandrakanthan, “Asian Bishops’ Approaches to Evangelisation: A Theological Evaluation and Critique of the Statements of the Plenary Assemblies of the FABC (1970-1983),” *Indian Missiological Review* 9 (April 1987) 105-127.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). For Lonergan, “Method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt. It is a framework for collaborative creativity.” See *ibid.*, xi. In his inaugural address at a congress held at the Gregorian University in 2004 on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Lonergan, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini makes an analogy between the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola and Lonergan’s book, considering the former as “a method for putting order into one’s own life,” and the latter as “a method for putting order into one’s own way of thinking, knowing, reasoning,” and concludes that Lonergan’s work “constitutes a new ‘organon’ permitting future generations to situate themselves in the river of human research with strong concepts and persuasions always capable of being perfected.” See “Bernard Lonergan at the Service of the Church,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 518, 526.

<sup>69</sup> The FABC often considers evangelisation as part of the overall mission of the Church, ignoring the distinction of these two terms in various conciliar and papal documents. See “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” art. 16, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 70; BIMA II, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 99; BIMA III, “A Syllabus of ‘Mission Concerns’,” art. 1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 106; BIMA IV, “Resolutions,” art. A.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 293. For the Asian bishops, “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” (BIMA IV, art. 6, [*FAPA Vol. 1*], 292). The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples employ the term evangelisation or evangelising mission to mean evangelisation in its broad sense of bringing the good news into all areas of humanity, and use the word proclamation to express the more specific understanding of evangelisation as the clear and unambiguous proclamation of the Lord Jesus. See “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” *Origins*



developing a systematic theological methodology. Instead, the starting point of their theological reflection and pastoral deliberation is the contextual realities, which they use as theological resources, which in turn have significantly shaped their theological method and content.<sup>70</sup>

The Asian bishops' theological approach, expressed in the structure of most of their plenary assembly statements and other documents, seems to follow the simple methodology of "See, Judge, Act," a pastoral process used by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne movement, founded by the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967).<sup>71</sup> In the first "See" stage of their approach, the Asian bishops use headings or

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21:8 (4 July 1991) 124. The term evangelisation occurs only 31 times in all the documents of Vatican II, which seems to speak of "evangelising" as "the proclamation of the basic Christian message to those who did not yet believe in Christ" (Avery Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," *America* [1 February 1992] 53). It becomes a key term in Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), which uses the term mission very sparsely. See Giancarlo Collet, "Theology of Mission or of Missions? The Treatment of a Controversial Term," *Concilium* 1 (1999) 88. Felipe Gómez notes that mission carries ecclesiological connotations, and evangelisation shifts towards Christology; he recalls that for Paul VI, one single term evangelization defines the whole of Christ's office and mandate (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 6). See "The Missionary Activity Twenty Years After Vatican II," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 23:1 (1986) 36. For Christopher O'Donnell, "the changing vocabulary about what was once called 'missions' is indicative of profound changes of understanding, and more probably also of an interim situation in the Church: missions have become the singular 'mission', often replaced with the word 'evangelization'." See *Ecclesia: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 304. In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II defines the term mission in both a theological and geographical sense, emphasising that the Church is "missionary by her very nature" (no. 62). This encyclical distinguishes three situations requiring different activities of the one mission of the Church: the mission *ad gentes* proper, the pastoral activity, and the new evangelisation (nos. 33-34). See his "*Redemptoris Missio*," *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 559, 553, 561. These understandings of the term evangelisation show that it does not easily lend itself to definition, and Stephen Blaire suggests that "perhaps evangelization could be looked upon as an umbrella covering all the work of the church which proclaims the word of God and invites all people in all circumstances to come to know Jesus Christ and to experience his salvation" ("Evangelization and the Contemporary Apologetic Moment," *Origins* 26:34 [13 February 1997] 557-8).

<sup>70</sup> Samuel Rayan asserts that the greatest gain achieved by Third World theology is the articulation of its methodology ("Third World Theology: Where Do We Go From Here?" *Concilium* 199 [August 1988] 129). For Felix Wilfred, "in the thought of the FABC, the pastoral and the theological are intimately linked" ("What the Spirit Says to the Churches (Rev 2:7)," *Vidyajyoti* 62 [1998] 124).

<sup>71</sup> Mary Irene Zoti, "Cardijn: A Priest Who Believes in the Priesthood of the Laity," *The Living Light*, 23:4 (June 1987) 312. Australian canon lawyer Stefan Gignacz argues in his Louvain doctoral thesis that "Cardijn's 'see, judge, act' method was actually a continuation of the work of the French lay Catholic democratic movement known as Le Sillon (the furrow), founded by Marc Sagnier, with even earlier roots in often marginalized Catholic lay movements and going back to the inspiration of prophetic figures like Frédéric Ozanam and also to the visionary but excommunicated French diocesan priest of the mid-century Felicité de Lamennais." See Joe Holland, "Roots of the Pastoral Circle in Personal Experiences and Catholic Social Tradition," in *The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, edited by Frans Wijzen, Peter Henriot, and Rodrigo Mejía (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005) 9.

phrases such as “Modern day Asia,”<sup>72</sup> “Some Aspects of the Present Religious Context of Asia and its Challenge,”<sup>73</sup> “The Presence of the Spirit and Signs of Hope in our Communities in Asia,”<sup>74</sup> “Challenges of Asia,”<sup>75</sup> “Challenge and Hopes,”<sup>76</sup> “A Vision of Life Amid Asian Realities,”<sup>77</sup> and “Issues and Challenges in the Mission of Love and Service.”<sup>78</sup> For the second “Judge” stage of their theological process, they use a variety of phases such as “The Challenge of Discerning the Asian Way,”<sup>79</sup> “The Church’s Response and Resolve: To Become More Fully a True Community of Prayer,”<sup>80</sup> and “The Evangelization of the Church in Contemporary Asia.”<sup>81</sup> In the final “Act” phase of their methodology they use headings and phrases such as “Recommendations of the Assembly,”<sup>82</sup> “Our Commitment,”<sup>83</sup> “Pastoral Concerns,”<sup>84</sup> “Specific Pastoral Directions, at the Level of Doing,”<sup>85</sup> and “A Few Practical Directions.”<sup>86</sup> Besides this “See, Judge, Act” framework, the FABC has also developed other structured methodologies, which will be examined in the next section.

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<sup>72</sup> FABC I, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> FABC II, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 30.

<sup>74</sup> FABC III, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 59.

<sup>75</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

<sup>76</sup> FABC V, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275.

<sup>77</sup> FABC VI, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 3.

<sup>78</sup> FABC VII, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> FABC VII, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> FABC II, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 31.

<sup>81</sup> FABC V, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279.

<sup>82</sup> FABC I, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> FABC II, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 36.

<sup>84</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.7.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194.

<sup>85</sup> FABC V, art. 7.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 285.

<sup>86</sup> FABC VII, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 12.

### 3.5.2 The Pastoral Cycle (1986)

In 1986, at BISA VII, for the first time since its inception, the bishops of Asia discussed a four-stage “pastoral cycle”<sup>87</sup> which revolves around “*prayer* as a covenantal relationship in faith”: exposure-immersion, social analysis, contemplation or ongoing theological reflection, and pastoral planning.<sup>88</sup> At this institute, the bishops endeavoured “to discover a liberative spirituality for social action among the poor and by the poor,” a spirituality that places “the Church at the service of the whole human race.”<sup>89</sup> In their view, “only through a deep spirituality grounded in interior prayer” can they experience God in the poor, reflect on that presence in day-to-day situations, and seek to bring to the oppressed what God challenges the Church to do.<sup>90</sup> Exposure brings us closer to the reality of poverty, but immersion enables us to “experience reality from the perspective of the poor themselves.”<sup>91</sup> Using social analysis “we evaluate the social, economic, political, cultural and religious systems in society,” and try to “discern God’s plan in the signs of the times, in the voices of our age, in the events of history as well as in the needs and aspirations” of the people.<sup>92</sup> Social analysis, the bishops affirm, is inadequate as a tool to grasp the whole of reality, and must be integrated with the religio-cultural reality in Asia to discern “its

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<sup>87</sup> Joe Holland identifies three historical roots of the pastoral circle in the tradition of Catholic social thought and action, namely Latin American liberation theology, the “See, Judge, Act” method used by Catholic Action movements, and “the praxis model (*phronesis*) of Aristotelian thought, which entered the Catholic tradition through medieval Scholasticism” (“Roots of the Pastoral Circle in Personal Experiences and Catholic Social Tradition,” in *The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, edited by Frans Wijzen, Peter Henriot, and Rodrigo Mejía [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005] 5). Contributors to this book note that the terms pastoral cycle, pastoral circle, and pastoral spiral have been used in different settings, with the first term being more popular in Asia, Australia, and the United Kingdom, the second widely used in Africa, Canada, and the United States, and the third “an exclusively Asian term.” See “Preface,” *ibid.*, xx-xxi. For these authors, the pastoral circle is “a process of answering four basic questions about some experience that we have, either as individuals or in a community setting”: What is happening here? Why is it happening? How do we evaluate it? and How do we respond? These questions occur during four moments of the pastoral circle, which mediate the “*experience*” of the situation: Contact, Analysis, Reflection, and Response. See “Steps in the Pastoral Circle,” *ibid.*, 229-30.

<sup>88</sup> BISA VII, arts. 8-13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 231-2.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 230.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 232.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 231.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 231.

positive, prophetic aspects that can inspire genuine spirituality,” and not just its “negative and enslaving aspects.”<sup>93</sup> Contemplation, “the stage of ongoing theological reflection,” makes us “discover God’s presence and activity within social reality,”<sup>94</sup> while pastoral planning aims to “translate the previous three stages into actual, realizable plans.”<sup>95</sup> In 1995 the FABC declared that the Pastoral Cycle, depicted in Figure 2, must be used in “all expressions of the ministry of the Word, including catechesis.”<sup>96</sup> They dropped the term “exposure” from this methodology, and modified slightly the headings of the four stages, which now read as immersion into reality, analysis of this experience, faith-reflection and discernment, and pastoral planning and action. The four-stage pastoral cycle can be mapped to the “See, Judge, Act” process: exposure-immersion and social analysis correlate with “See”; contemplation or ongoing theological reflection corresponds to “Judge”; and there is a parallel between pastoral planning and “Act.”

In May 2000, the FABC’s Office of Theological Concerns referred to the Pastoral Cycle as a cycle of “social analysis” of the signs of the times, “theological reflection” to discern them in the light of the Gospel, and planning for the future and specifying missionary response.<sup>97</sup> This cycle begins with “our faith in Jesus Christ, the experience of that faith in prayer and in the covenant relationship that we share with our Christian brothers and sisters.”<sup>98</sup> It is “a cycle which continually repeats itself and results in a theology different from that of former times, a living theology which constantly strives to discern the working of the Spirit in a rapidly changing world.”<sup>99</sup> Five months later, in October 2000, its Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious

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<sup>93</sup> BISA VII, arts. 9-10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 231-2. Peter C. Phan notes that “the FABC does not specify which method of social analysis to be employed,” and argues that “implicitly, the FABC considers Marxist social analysis, which was favored by Latin American liberation theology, insufficient for the Asian situation” (“Human Development and Evangelization (The First to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences),” (*Studia Missionalia* 47 [1998] 213).

<sup>94</sup> BISA VII, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 231-2.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 232.

<sup>96</sup> OESC, “A Renewed Catechesis for Asia Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 31.

<sup>97</sup> OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 331.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

Affairs discussed this Pastoral Cycle Methodology again in the context of formation for interreligious dialogue and simplified it into three R's: review of experiences, observations and learning, reflection in light of histories and traditions, and responses in the context of present and existential realities.<sup>100</sup> The following year, at the Second Asian Laity Meeting in 2001, the Asian bishops encouraged the use of this process of "exposure, reflection and action" in the formation of the laity.<sup>101</sup> At this meeting, the term "exposure" was used to encompass what is meant by "immersion" as exposure was seen as a means to help Christians "to learn, to see, to feel and share in the suffering of others."<sup>102</sup> By interpreting the Pastoral Cycle Methodology as a three-phase process in the last three interpretations, the Asian bishops have clearly opted for a simplified methodology that fits in with the "See, Judge, Act" process, a framework that they have effectively applied in structuring most of the final statements of their plenary assemblies.<sup>103</sup>

### 3.5.3 The "Mission Process" (1990)

At the Fifth Plenary Assembly in 1990 the Asian bishops declared that their reflection on Asia's realities in the light of *their mission of evangelisation* [italics added] has led them to realise "the enduring validity of a process of: (a) *dialoguing* with the realities of Asia from within; (b) *discerning* the movement of God's Spirit in Asia; and (c) *translating into deeds* what the Spirit bids us to accomplish" (italics in the original).<sup>104</sup> For them, this process has to be the general approach for their total response as Church in Asia.<sup>105</sup> We call this process the "mission process" as the

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<sup>100</sup> OEIA, "FIRA III," arts. 5.1, 2.3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 137, 134.

<sup>101</sup> OL, "Second Asian Laity Meeting: Final Statement," art. 4.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 115.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 2.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 114.

<sup>103</sup> Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan expands the FABC's theological process into a "five-fold methodology" including (i) a commitment to life, (ii) dialectical social analysis, (iii) critical introspective contemplation, (iv) triple dialogue with Asian cultures, religions and the poor, and (v) quest for harmony in the task of theologizing in the Asian milieu." Tan states that "this division of the FABC's theological methodology into five stages" is his "own division, classification and explication" for the purposes of his chapter. See "Theologizing at the Service of Life," *Gregorianum* 81:3 (2000) 544.

<sup>104</sup> FABC V, art. 7.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 284.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

bishops would later emphasise the use of this methodology of “dialogue, discernment and deeds” in the context of Christians as the evangelising and liberating force in the struggle for fullness of life,<sup>106</sup> or the explication of this process of “Dialogue-Discernment-Deeds” as “Dialogue with the World of Asia and Discernment as Church in the light of the Gospel” leading us “to be a Prophetic Church.”<sup>107</sup>

Figure 2 provides a graphical summary of the main theological methodologies of the Asian bishops. It highlights our argument that it is the “See, Judge, Act” process that underlies their theological and pastoral reflection. Other methods and insights, such as the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach and the discussion on the work of theology in Asia, will also be discussed in this section as they provide further clarification and amplification of the FABC’s theological methodologies.

### Theological Methodologies of the FABC

The Pastoral Cycle Methodology					“Mission Process”	
1986	1995	May 2000	Oct 2000	2001	1990	
Exposure Immersion	Immersion into Reality	Social Analysis	Review	Exposure	Dialoguing	“See”
Social Analysis	Analysis					
Contem- plation or The ological Reflection	Faith Reflection & Discernment	The ological Reflection	Reflection	Reflection	Discerning	“Judge”
Pastoral Planning	Pastoral Planning & Action	Plan & Response	Response	Action	Translating into Deeds	“Act”

Figure 2.

<sup>106</sup> FABC VI, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2.

<sup>107</sup> OHD, “The Prophetic Path to the New Millennium Through Social Advocacy,” art. 3.14, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 50.

### 3.5.4 The “Communion Process”: Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (1993)

The Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) came into being in 1993 at a Consultation sponsored by the FABC’s Office of Human Development and Office of Laity.<sup>108</sup> It is not a theological methodology, but a pastoral process that seeks to promote a new way of being Church, a participatory Church envisioned and encouraged by the FABC during its Fifth Plenary Assembly meeting held in 1990.<sup>109</sup> The bishops’ vision, articulated at this assembly, is that the Church in Asia will have to be “a *communion of communities*, where laity, religious and clergy recognise and accept each other as sisters and brothers,” and “a participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful – lay, religious, and cleric alike – are recognised and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized” (*italics in the original*).<sup>110</sup>

AsIPA is “Asian” because it seeks to implement the FABC’s vision and to face the realities of the Asian peoples.<sup>111</sup> It is “integral” in terms of content, collaboration of different pastoral agents, and coordination of structures at different levels. With regard to content it includes “standing up against injustice,” “ecumenical interreligious dialogue,” “direct proclamation of the Gospel,” “active participation of the laity,” “the quest for integrity of creation,” “deepening the faith,” “aiming at small Christian communities,” “forming of communion of communities,” [and] “centered on the Presence of the Risen Lord.”<sup>112</sup> It is “pastoral” in that it aims to implement “the vision of the new way of being church,” involving “the participation of the entire community” and “a new style of leadership which will be an enabling and animating one.”<sup>113</sup> AsIPA is both an “approach” and a concrete realisation of the vision of a

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<sup>108</sup> Office of Laity and Office of Human Development, “Asian Integral Pastoral Approach: towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia (AsIPA),” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 108.

<sup>109</sup> FABC V, art. 8.1.1-8.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287.

<sup>110</sup> FABC V, arts. 8.1.1-2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287.

<sup>111</sup> Office of Laity and Office of Human Development, “Asian Integral Pastoral Approach: towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia (AsIPA),” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 108.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

participatory church. It is also a “community building approach” which awakens the laity at the grassroots level “to discover their common mission and realise their social responsibility.”<sup>114</sup> For the FABC, AsIPA is a useful methodology that helps basic ecclesial communities to grow and develop, and as such, it is an indispensable tool in fostering an ecclesial communion marked by authentic participation and co-responsibility.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, we venture to call it a “communion process.”

### 3.5.5 Theology as Service to Life (1994 & 2000)

In 2000, the FABC’s Office of Theological Concerns issued a lengthy document on theological thinking in the Asian context,<sup>116</sup> stating that “it is rather a continuation of the tradition of the Church, a living tradition which today in Asia experiences an encounter with other Asian religious traditions and Asian cultures.”<sup>117</sup> It discusses the question of pluralism, provides an overview of “traditional Christian theological methods in the east and the west,” considers the resources used by Asian theologians to develop an Asian theology, investigates the nascent Asian biblical hermeneutics and methods of interpreting the Scriptures of other religions in Asia, and finally reviews “the question of the use of symbol, narrative, and myth in the Asian religious traditions.”<sup>118</sup> This document aims “to shed some light on the emerging theological methods used by Asian theologians,” and not “to define ‘An Asian Method of Theology’.”<sup>119</sup> It mentions briefly “the methods of theological reflection” employed by the FABC.<sup>120</sup> These methods display a consistent pattern in the thinking of the Asian bishops, who consider contextual realities as resources of theology, embodying and manifesting the presence and action of God and the Holy Spirit. Using these resources has become integral to their thought process, and as a result, introduced a

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> FABC VII, art. III.C.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 15; OL, “Second Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) General Assembly II,” art. 1.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 108.

<sup>116</sup> OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 329-419.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 356.



significant change in their theological methodologies. In 1994, in a statement issued by their Theological Advisory Commission, they assert that theology in Asia is “more than faith seeking understanding but faith fostering life and love, justice and freedom.”<sup>121</sup> This theology is first and foremost “a service to life.”<sup>122</sup> For them, theology must become “a dynamic process giving meaning to and facilitating the Asian journey to life,”<sup>123</sup> by starting from below, “from the underside of history, from the perspective of those who struggle for life, love, justice, and freedom.”<sup>124</sup> Asian theology, they insist, has to “reflect systematically on themes that are important to the common journey of life with other peoples in Asia, to the life of Christians and their churches in Asia, and to the work of the Asian Episcopal conferences.”<sup>125</sup> Theology, in this way, becomes “part of the process of becoming and being Church in Asia.”<sup>126</sup> It is, according to Vietnamese American theologian Peter C. Phan, “essentially ecclesial” in the sense that it is “at the service of the mission of the church.”<sup>127</sup> The salient features of this theology and its Asian way of theologising will be taken up in the next section.

### 3.6 Characteristics of the FABC’s Contextual Theology

There is no doubt that readers of the documents of the FABC issued between 1970 and 2001 will find that its contextual theology, which continues to evolve in a highly creative way in response to the changing context of Asia, is multi-faceted and very rich in content. Therefore, it is simply too daunting a task to attempt to capture all of its features. However, within the limited scope of this chapter, we would like to draw

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<sup>121</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226. See also Office of Theological Concerns, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” art. 3.2.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 357.

<sup>122</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 50, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 49, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 50, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>127</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Theology on the Other Side of the Borders: Responding to the Signs of the Times,” *CTSA Proceedings* 57 (2002) 91.

out five of its major characteristics, which complement and enrich each other: (i) a synthetic contextual character, (ii) a similarity between the FABC's theological methodology and that of Latin American liberation theologies, (iii) a faith seeking triple dialogue, (iv) an approach that encourages theological pluralism and aims to achieve harmony, and (v) a development that constitutes a paradigm shift in theology.

### 3.6.1 Synthetic Contextual Theology

Discussing inculturation of theology in Asia, Stephen Bevens contends that the FABC's treatment of inculturation implies a "transcendental model" of contextual theology because in this model "what matters is not so much the content of what is written or spoken, but the authenticity of faith and cultural connectedness with which theology is done."<sup>128</sup> For him, the FABC's theology may use concepts and symbols that are not exclusively Asian, but it may still be considered as "authentically Asian" because it is the result of a "community which has striven to express Christian faith as an authentic cultural subject."<sup>129</sup> This view has the advantage of highlighting the sustained efforts of the Asian bishops in their dialogue with the cultures of Asia. However, a close reading of the documents shows that the FABC's theology displays the bolder features of a synthetic model, which incorporates the insights of three models of translation, anthropological, and praxis. First, at the Second Plenary Assembly the bishops state that the handing-on of the traditional values to present and future generations "calls for creative assimilation and 'translation' into contemporary cultural expression."<sup>130</sup> Secondly, this theology reveals an anthropological character in that it takes human experience, human culture, and human history as a theological resource on a par with two *loci theologici* of Scripture and tradition.<sup>131</sup> Thirdly, it also shows major elements of a praxis model because, according the bishops, "doing the truth comes before the formulation of doctrine," and "Churches in Asia should not

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<sup>128</sup> Stephen Bevens, "Inculturation of Theology in Asia," *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996) 16.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> FABC II, art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 31.

<sup>131</sup> OTC, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology," arts. 3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 356. Felix Wilfred uses "*anthropological*" to mean "cultural forms and expressions, patterns of thought and social relationship..." and "*theological*" to refer to "faith, mystery of the church, grace..." ("Inculturation as a Hermeneutical Question: Reflections in the Asian Context," *Vidyajyoti* 52 [September 1988] 424).

wait [for] a satisfactory theological answer before going further in praxis of dialogue and proclamation.”<sup>132</sup> The bishops stress that it is “in this systematic reflection on sustained praxis that we discover what God is saying to the Churches.”<sup>133</sup> In short, as the synthetic contextual model, the FABC’s theology holds in balance four contextual elements of Gospel, tradition, culture, and social change in its ongoing dialogue with the cultures, the religions and the poor of Asia by way of a three-fold strategy of inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation.

### 3.6.2 Liberation Theology

There is a close resemblance between the FABC’s theological approach,<sup>134</sup> which generally follows a “See, Judge, Act” process, and the method employed by Latin American liberation theologies,<sup>135</sup> which is based on “three mediations—socioanalytic, hermeneutical and practical.”<sup>136</sup> In contrast to Western theologies

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<sup>132</sup> OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization, Dialogue and Proclamation,” art. 53, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 205.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> A.J.V Chandrakanthan observes that under the inspiration of the social encyclicals and the theology of liberation “at work in Latin America, many theologians, the FABC, some national Episcopal conferences and even individual bishops have begun to study, analyze and, if possible, uproot the socio-political and religio-cultural causes of poverty and injustice in Asia” (“Emerging Trends in Asian Theology,” *Theology Digest* 39:4 [Winter 1992] 340).

<sup>135</sup> Christopher Rowland notes that “liberation theology is above all a new way of *doing* theology rather than being itself a new theology” (“Introduction: The Theology of Liberation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, edited by Christopher Rowland [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999] 3). James B. Nickoloff notes that “In July, 1968, a month before the Medellín conference, Gutiérrez presented a proposal for a ‘theology of liberation’ at a gathering of priests of the National Office of Social Research (ONIS) in Chimbote, Peru. This marks the first time the term ‘theology of liberation’ was used, in Latin America or anywhere else, as far as we can know.” See “Introduction,” in *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, edited by James B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 5.

<sup>136</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Method in Liberation Theologies,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 61. Clodovis Boff classifies the theological methodology of Latin American liberation theology into three mediations: social-analytic, hermeneutic, and practical, following more explicitly the “See, Judge, Act” model. See his book *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987). Phan notes that Exposure-Immersion “corresponds to *praxis*,” a concept understood by Boff as the fundamental *locus* of liberation theology, that is, “its point of departure, its milieu and its finality.” See Phan, “Human Development and Evangelization (The first to the sixth plenary assembly of the federation of Asian bishops’ conferences),” *Studia Missionalia* 47 (1998) 213; Clodovis Boff, *ibid.*, xxi. Phan also equates socio-analytic mediation with “social analysis,” hermeneutic mediation with “contemplation,” and practical mediation with “pastoral planning.” *Ibid.*, 214; see also footnote 64 in Peter C. Phan, “Doing Theology in the Context of Cultural and Religious Pluralism: An Asian Perspective,” *Louvain Studies* 27:1 (Spring 2002) 59.

which deal with the challenges to faith posed by the non-believer, the locus of liberation theologies is the non-person, understood as the poor, the oppressed, the exploited, and the marginalised. By reflecting and expanding on two motifs of liberation, considered to be the best translation of salvation,<sup>137</sup> and the preferential option for the poor,<sup>138</sup> liberation theology is not just a “theology *about* the poor,” but a “theology *for* the poor.”<sup>139</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza stresses this point observing that “the interpretation of experience as an experience of oppression is common to all liberation theologies.”<sup>140</sup> Therefore, the key questions for liberation theologies are “how to proclaim God as Father in an inhuman world? and “how do we tell the ‘non-persons’ that they are the sons and daughters of God?”<sup>141</sup> In the context of Asia, Asian bishops seek to address problems and issues associated with, not only the massive poverty of the population, but also the plurality of soteriological religions and

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<sup>137</sup> For Gustavo Gutiérrez, “to speak about a theology of liberation is to seek an answer to the following question: what relation is there between salvation and the historical process of human liberation?” (*A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988] 29).

<sup>138</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez asserts that “the poor occupy a central position in the reflection that we call the theology of liberation” (“Option for the Poor,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, edited by Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993] 235). For Gutiérrez and the Church’s magisterium, “‘preferential’ means ‘having priority’,” and “‘to opt for the poor’ (*optar por los pobres* in Spanish) means to make a free decision to side with the oppressed and powerless in their fight for justice and to stand against all persons and structures that oppose their liberation.” See James B. Nickoloff, “Introduction,” in *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, edited by James B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 13.

<sup>139</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, “Liberation Theology and the Roman Catholic Church,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, edited by Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 179. The late doyen of Vaticanologists notes that the phrase “option for the poor” was “first used in a letter from Pedro Arrupe to the Jesuits of Latin America in May 1968.” Ibid. According to David J. Bosch, the phrase “preferential option for the poor” was coined at the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, Mexico. See *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991) 435.

<sup>140</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology: Task and Methods,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 62.

<sup>141</sup> G. Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, edited by Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 28; see also Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Editorial: A Prophetic Theology,” *Concilium* 6:10 (June 1974) 10. Elsewhere, Gutiérrez states that “Liberation Theology, more than any other kind of theology, comes into being from the crucible of human anguish and suffering.... From the unjust suffering of the poor emerges the question: Where is the God who is love? And that question continues to be the source of all that is being asked about God in our part of the world” (“How Can God be Discussed from the Perspective of Ayacucho?” *Concilium* 1 [1990] 104).

the diversity of local cultures.<sup>142</sup> Triple dialogue with these realities is the Asian bishops' theological and pastoral orientation.

### 3.6.3 Faith Seeking Triple Dialogue

The theological concept of dialogue occupies a special place in the mind of the Asian Catholic Bishops right from their First Plenary Assembly held in 1974 to consider issues and strategies relating to the "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia".<sup>143</sup> This notion has permeated their entire corpus, and culminated in the coinage of the phrase "triple dialogue" or "three-fold dialogue" in the Sixth and Seventh Plenary Assembly.<sup>144</sup> The three-dimensional dialogue, social, religious, and cultural, is differentiated into four types: "dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds, dialogue of experts, and dialogue in sharing the experiences of faith."<sup>145</sup> For the bishops, dialogue is, first of all, a "dialogue of life"<sup>146</sup> where people collaborate to promote whatever leads to unity, love, truth, justice, and peace. True dialogue has to respond to the realities in Asia where the majority of people live in poverty, and should lead to "a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice" by seeking "the change and transformation of unjust social structures."<sup>147</sup> This dialogue is based "on the firm belief that the Holy Spirit is operative in other religions as well."<sup>148</sup> As "God is present and working through the Spirit in the whole of creation," Christians, together with people of other faiths, must endeavour to discover the transforming love of God

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<sup>142</sup> For Aloysius Pieris, the Asian Church and its theology must be baptised in the Jordan of Asian religions and on the cross of Asian poverty as in Asia, religiosity and poverty "seem to coalesce in order to procreate the Asian character." See "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religiocultural Guidelines," in *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, edited by Douglas J. Elwood, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980) 240; see also his two classics *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), and *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988).

<sup>143</sup> FABC I, arts. 14-20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14-5.

<sup>144</sup> FABC VII, Part I, art. A8, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4; FABC VI, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2.

<sup>145</sup> BIRA IV/2, art. 8.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 253.

<sup>146</sup> FABC I, art. 20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 15; FABC III, art. 17.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 61; FABC IV, art. 3.1.11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 181.

<sup>147</sup> FABC I, art. 21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 15.

<sup>148</sup> BIRA IV/2, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 253.

and make it “a more living experience.”<sup>149</sup> There is also dialogue with the Asian cultures, as the primary focus of evangelisation is to make “the message and life of Jesus truly incarnate in the minds and lives” of the people of Asia.<sup>150</sup> Here, the FABC shares similar concerns of African theology, which endeavours to reconcile the Christian message with African culture, and emphasises “the *unity* of sacred and secular, individual and community, the living and the dead.”<sup>151</sup> It is noteworthy that, unlike liberation theology which has often been criticised as “reductionistic”—by reducing “the Christian message to social reform” and by turning “the Church into a political group”<sup>152</sup>—the FABC’s theology of proclamation and triple dialogue interprets the full imperative of the Gospel in the Asian context.

To meet the challenges of evangelisation, the Asian bishops follow the lead of Vatican II, and use the “signs of the times methodology,”<sup>153</sup> to discern particular

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<sup>149</sup> FABC, “International Congress on Mission: Workshop III: Dialogue with Other Religious Traditions in Asia,” art. 3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 141.

<sup>150</sup> FABC I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. I*, 14.

<sup>151</sup> Odilo Metzler, “‘Third World’ Theology in *Concilium*,” *Concilium* 170 (December 1983) 83; Nazaire Bitoto Abeng, “Are Attempts at the Inculturation of Christianity in Africa Failing?” *Concilium* 5 (1990) 91. Pope John Paul II recalls that “the [African] synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the particular churches for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa. It is ‘a requirement for evangelization’, ‘a path for full evangelization’ and one of the greatest challenges for the church on the continent on the eve of the third millennium.” See “*Ecclesia in Africa*,” no. 59, *Origins* 25:16 (5 October 1995) 260. At this synod, “the bishops of Africa defined their form of the church as being that of a family” (F. Kabasele Lumbala, “The Church as Family in Africa,” *Concilium* 4 [1995] 93).

<sup>152</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Church’s Religious Identity and Its Social and Political Mission,” *Theological Studies* 43:2 (June 1982) 204.

<sup>153</sup> James H. Kroeger, “Signs of the Times: A Thirty-year Panorama,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 2 (1989) 191-6. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 4 affirms that “at all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time, and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its tasks.” *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. 1, ed. Austin Flannery, new rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996) 905. The phrase “reading the signs of the times” and its equivalents are also in other conciliar documents: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 14, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* no. 9, and *Unitatis Reintegratio* no. 4. Robert E. Lampert notes that this phrase first appeared in the “Zurich text,” one of Vatican II’s preparatory texts written in 1964, and its criticism led to the establishment of the Subcommission *Signa Temporum* to clarify its meaning. See Thomas Kopfensteiner, “The Role of the Church in Reading the Signs of the Times,” *CTSA Proceedings* 57 (2002) 129. Members of the Subcommission included Marie-Dominique Chenu, often called the theologian of the signs of the times, “who used the phrase to capture the relationship between the Church and the world” (*Ibid.*, 129-30). In a *Relatio* during the Council discussion of *Gaudium et Spes*, which was based on the work of the Subcommission, Philippe Delhay and F. Houtart defined the signs of the times as “phenomena, which due to their generalization and great frequency, characterize an epoch, and through which present humankind expresses its needs and aspirations.” Quoted in Felipe Gómez, “Signs of the Times,” *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 3-4 (1989) 367; see also Thomas Kopfensteiner, “The Role of the Church in Reading the Signs of the Times,” *CTSA Proceedings* 57

challenges of the times and formulate pastoral strategies and responses.<sup>154</sup> For them, “identifying and analysing the signs of the times” is the task of the Asian Churches if they want to discover the path that God wants them to follow.<sup>155</sup> The Church, they affirm, becomes truly inculturated when it decentres itself, is catholic in its concerns, appreciates the gifts of others, is ready to “work with others for a world at once more human and more divine,” and stands with its “sisters and brothers of other faiths in confronting issues of life and death.”<sup>156</sup> At their First Plenary Meeting in 1974, the bishops stressed that the primary focus of the evangelising mission was “the building up of the local church.”<sup>157</sup> And building up a local Church means undertaking a threefold dialogue with the cultures (inculturation),<sup>158</sup> the religions (interreligious dialogue) and the poor of Asia (liberation).<sup>159</sup> The local Church thus is called to be a

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(2002) 129. In an audience on 16 April 1966, Pope Paul VI described reading the signs of the times as “a theological interpretation of contemporary history,” and an endeavour to “discover, in time, ... indications of a relationship with the kingdom of God.” Quoted by Michael J. Himes in “Reading the Signs of the Times: Theological Reflections,” *CTSA Proceedings* 57 (2002) 1. In an brilliant chapter on “The Signs of the Times,” José Comblin notes that the phrase was understood by Pope John XXIII and Vatican II in two different meanings, “which are not always clearly distinguished”: first, the signs of the times refer to events, situations, and changes taking place in society; secondly, as eschatological signs, they point to “the presence of God in this world” (“The Signs of the Times,” *Concilium* 4 [2005] 73). For Comblin, the most comprehensive study on the signs of the times according to Vatican II is Clodovis Boff, *Sinais dos tempos: Principios de leitura*, Sao Paulo, 1979. Ibid., 85.

<sup>154</sup> FABC I, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13.

<sup>155</sup> APMC, art. 20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 71.

<sup>156</sup> BIRA IV/12, arts. 49-50, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 333.

<sup>157</sup> FABC I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Schreiter notes that “the term ‘inculturation’ (at least in its nominal form) was to come out of a General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1973, and to be presented to the world by Father Pedro Arrupe the following year. Four years later, it would be taken up by the Synod on catechesis and be used by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation ‘Catechesis tradende.’” See “The Legacy of St. Francis Xavier: Inculturation of the Gospel Then and Now,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 44:1 (2007) 29. Leonardo Boff contends that “the inculturation of the gospel is the process by which a culture assimilates the gospel in terms of its own cultural matrixes. Only with inculturation is there authentic evangelization—an encounter between a particular culture and the evangelical aspirations” (*New Evangelization: Good News to the Poor*, translated from the Portuguese by Robert R. Barr [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978] 8). However, according to Avery Dulles, “Paul VI avoided terms such as inculturation, which could be taken to suggest that the culture is a satisfactory vessel for Christian faith. On the ground that cultures need to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel, he spoke by preference of the evangelization of cultures as an imperative for our time (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 20).” See “Models of Evangelization,” *Origins* 37:1 (17 May 2007) 10.

<sup>159</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of Asian theologies on this triple dialogue, namely inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation, see Peter C. Phan’s trilogy: *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003); *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books,

community of dialogue to proclaim “Jesus Christ to their fellow humans in a dialogical manner.”<sup>160</sup> This dialogical model, for the FABC, is “a new way of being Church”<sup>161</sup> in a continent marked by a diversity of religions and cultures, which in turn implies and requires an openness to theological pluralism.

### 3.6.4 Theological Pluralism

Indeed, in Asia, each local Church has to confront a different set of issues when it seeks to dialogue with local cultures, local religions, and the poor. Their starting point for reflection on Christian faith is the variety of contextually conditioned experiences, which themselves dictate a theological pluralism. Since their first gathering in 1970 the Asian bishops have encouraged this pluralism in theology.<sup>162</sup> In their view, pluralism is a “positive and creative sign” that “unity is deeper than whatever the concrete technical analysis or viewpoints might show.”<sup>163</sup> “Pluralism also gives the advantageous value of complementarity.”<sup>164</sup> The bishops affirm “a stance of *receptive pluralism*” recognising “the fact that people encounter the Spirit within their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, culture and worldviews” (italics in the original).<sup>165</sup> For them, “it is important to cultivate an all-embracing and complementary way of thinking,” as it is “very characteristic of Asian traditions” to “consider the various dimensions of reality not as contradictory, but as

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2003); and *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>160</sup> BIRA VI/12, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 328; “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization, Dialogue and Proclamation: Conclusions of the Theological Consultation, Thailand, 3-10 November 1991,” art. 51, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 205.

<sup>161</sup> BIRA IV/12, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 332; “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization, Dialogue and Proclamation: Conclusions of the Theological Consultation, Thailand, 3-10 November 1991,” arts. 41-42, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 202-3. Peter C. Phan observes that “the FABC has advocated a new way of being church and of doing theology in Asia. This new way consists in a triple dialogue, namely, dialogue with Asian cultures (inculturation), with Asian religions (interreligious dialogue), and with Asian peoples, especially the poor (liberation)” (“‘Presence and Prominence in the Lord’s House’: Asians and Pacific People in the American Catholic Church,” in *Many Faces, One Church*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005] 113).

<sup>162</sup> OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” art. 1.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 336.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, BISA II, art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 204.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> BIRA IV, art. 16, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 261.



complementary (yinyang).”<sup>166</sup> They also recognise the “insufficiency of current human expressions” of the Christian faith, and “such insufficiency allows for pluralism in theology.”<sup>167</sup> In their view, diversity “represents richness and strength” and “the test of true harmony lies in the acceptance of diversity as richness.”<sup>168</sup> Harmony, they affirm, embodies “the realities of order, well-being, justice and love as seen in human interaction.”<sup>169</sup> They believe 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.”<sup>170</sup> According to the FABC, “one of the serious obstacles to harmony is the attitude of exclusivity,” and “the failure to view the complementarity which exists between peoples, cultures, faiths, ideologies, world-visions, etc.”<sup>171</sup> Therefore, they conclude that some of the common, national and regional problems that the nations of Asia face today are due to a lack of harmony.<sup>172</sup>

The FABC first discussed the theme of harmony in 1984, stating 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.”<sup>173</sup> Hence, there is an imperative for a study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context,

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<sup>166</sup> BIRA IV/11, art. 20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 322. For Michael Amaladoss, “Euro-American cultures, thanks to the legacy of Greece, are dominated by rationality, logo-centrism, concepts and linear, logical thinking. These characteristics are affiliated with the activities of the left-brain. Asian cultures, on the contrary, are dominated on the whole by the activities of the right brain. They are more symbolic and based on narrative rather than concept, inductive and intuitive rather than deductive, proceeding by the circular, but dynamic movement of the *yin* and *yang* than by logical argument” (“Contextual Theology and Integration,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 40:3 [2003] 269-70). He notes that “Euro-American cultures have a dualistic view of reality,” and “the Indian *advaita* (non-duality) and the Chinese *tao* (one) deny such dichotomy.” See *ibid.*, 270. He goes on to argue that unlike Euro-American people who see God as “the great Other when compared to God’s creation” and turn their gaze outward and upward, Asians turn their gaze inward as for them, “the Absolute is within, immanent,” and “the Absolute is experienced as the depth of one’s being.” *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>167</sup> OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” art. 1.5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 337.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 321.

<sup>169</sup> BIRA IV/10, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 313-4.

<sup>170</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 298.

<sup>171</sup> BIRA IV/11, art. 20, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 322.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> BIRA IV/1, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 249.

which could lead to interreligious dialogue.<sup>174</sup> For the bishops, “scripture offers a pluriformity of models for harmony: Creation, Covenant, People of God, and Kingdom of God. Although all four models contain the dynamics of God’s presence, the Kingdom of God is the core of Christ’s proclamation and embodies the first three,” and “provides the most action-oriented model for fostering harmony within society.”<sup>175</sup> However the FABC stresses that “the promotion of harmony and commitment to action is not the preserve of the small Christian community of Asia.”<sup>176</sup> As it is a common task, Christians should “strive for a holistic realization of harmony together with others,” including the resources of other faiths to “achieve mutual enrichment.”<sup>177</sup> The FABC is “committed to the emergence of the Asianness of the Church in Asia. This means that the Church has to be an embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially interiority, harmony, a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life.”<sup>178</sup> It is clear, then, the transition from a Eurocentric theology to a plurality of theologies in an Asian context has taken place. In the process, it has initiated a “paradigm shift” in theology. Let us now look at the meaning and implications of this phrase by calling on the work of Hans Küng.

### 3.6.5 Paradigm Change in Theology

In 1989 an international ecumenical symposium was held at the University of Tübingen, entitled “Paradigm Change in Theology.” There, in the first of his papers, Hans Küng applies Thomas Kuhn’s notion of paradigm shift to the whole of Christian

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<sup>174</sup> BIRA IV/1, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 249. In a response to Roger Haight’s outline of principles and methodological points for the inculturation of theology, Peter C. Phan agrees with Haight that “theology is a human and cultural activity,” but expands the latter’s understanding of inculturation from the perspective of an Asian theology developed in the context of the FABC by asserting that the question is not whether “the new inculturated theology is faithful to the tradition but whether the tradition and the new integrated theology can exist in harmony, in difference and variety.” See Robert Lassalle-Klein, “North American Contextual Theologies,” *CTSA Proceedings* 56 (2001) 191-2.

<sup>175</sup> BIRA IV/1, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 314.

<sup>176</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 298.

<sup>177</sup> BIRA IV/10, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 314.

<sup>178</sup> FABC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

theology.<sup>179</sup> Using the latter's definition of paradigm as "an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community,"<sup>180</sup> Küng discusses parallels, differences, and analogies between paradigm changes in natural sciences and those occurring in theology, and endeavours to interpret the present theological situation in terms of paradigm changes.<sup>181</sup> He formulates five theses, the first of which postulates that the "theological community has a 'normal science' with its classical authors, textbooks and teachers, which is characterised by a cumulative growth of knowledge, by a solution of remaining problems ... and by resistance to everything that might result in a changing or replacement of the established paradigm."<sup>182</sup> His second thesis states that "in the theological community, awareness of a growing crisis is the starting point for the advent of a drastic change in certain hitherto prevailing basic assumptions and eventually causes the breakthrough of a new paradigm or model of understanding."<sup>183</sup> According to his third thesis, "an older paradigm or model of understanding is replaced when a new one is available."<sup>184</sup> In his fourth thesis, Küng argues that "in the acceptance or rejection of a new paradigm, not only scientific, but extra-scientific factors are involved, so that the transition to a new model cannot be purely rationally extorted [*sic*], but may be described as a conversion."<sup>185</sup> His fifth thesis states that "it

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<sup>179</sup> Hans Küng, "Paradigm Change in Theology: A Proposal for Discussion," in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 3-33.

<sup>180</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn [physicist and historian of science], *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, enlarged (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 175.

<sup>181</sup> Küng, "Paradigm Change in Theology: A Proposal for Discussion," in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 9, 11-29. Küng believes that the term "paradigm" can be ambiguous and prefers to use "interpretive models, explanatory models, models for understanding (*Verstehensmodelle*).<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 7. He also employs the terms "paradigm" and "model" interchangeably. Ibid., 10.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 14. According to Küng, the theological community includes "scholars and non-scholars, theologians at a university or in a basic community, professional writers or laity." See "A New Basic Model for Theology: Divergences and Convergences," in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 443.

<sup>183</sup> Küng, "Paradigm Change in Theology: A Proposal for Discussion," *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 27. Küng contends that a new paradigm demands something like a conversion, or a new conviction, in the recipients who have to decide for or against. Convincing objective reasons are important for a conversion but in the last resort it is a question of trust. Ibid., 25.

can be predicted with difficulty, in the midst of great controversies, whether a new paradigm is absorbed into the old, replaces the old or is shelved for a long period. But if it is accepted, innovation is consolidated as tradition.”<sup>186</sup>

Küng firmly believes that a paradigm change does not involve a total break, and “in every paradigm change, despite all discontinuity, there is a fundamental continuity.”<sup>187</sup> He contends that “every paradigm change shows at the same time continuity and discontinuity, rationality and irrationality, conceptual stability and conceptual change, evolutionary and revolutionary elements.”<sup>188</sup> In his view, the tradition is not recovered but formulated anew in light of a new paradigm.<sup>189</sup>

In his second contribution Küng attempts to “*periodize* the paradigm change in theology and the church,”<sup>190</sup> and identifies the underlying consensus that exists in each of these periods through and within their differences in theological approaches and methodologies. For him, “*several* theologies are possible within a *single* paradigm.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Hans Küng, “What Does a Change of Paradigm Mean?” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 212-9. In an earlier work, Küng identifies six “*macro paradigms or epochal global constellations*” in the history of Christianity: “1. the Jewish-apocalyptic paradigm of early Christianity; 2. the ecumenical-Hellenistic paradigm of Christian Antiquity; 3. the Roman Catholic paradigm of the Middle Ages; 4. the Protestant-Evangelical paradigm of the Reformation; 5. the modern paradigm of reason and progress; 6. the ecumenical paradigm of post-modernity” (“Islam: Radical Changes in History – Challenges of the Present,” *Concilium* 5 [2005] 98). David J. Bosch uses these historical-theological subdivisions to organise his *magnum opus*, and observes that in the natural sciences “the new paradigm usually replaces the old, definitely and irreversibly,” while in theology “‘old’ paradigms can live on”; see *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991) 181, 187, 186. For Claude Geffré, “we are experiencing a *theological turning-point* that is inspired by a new paradigm, that of religious pluralism,” even though, in his view, the word paradigm is “undoubtedly too strong to describe the major changes going on within the Christian thought” (“The Crisis of Christian Identity in an Age of Religious Pluralism,” *Concilium* 3 [2005] 17).

<sup>191</sup> Hans Küng, “What Does a Change of Paradigm Mean?” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 215.

In the third presentation at the symposium on paradigm change Küng explains that a paradigm develops and matures slowly in a matrix of varying social, political, ecclesial and theological factors, and that it “includes not merely gradual but also drastic changes.”<sup>192</sup> For theology, an important criterion for a new paradigm is the capacity to be aware of crises and to cope with them.<sup>193</sup>

According to Küng, “the paradigm theory is no more than a hermeneutical framework.”<sup>194</sup> He concludes that it is possible to reach a basic hermeneutical consensus despite all our theological differences and divergences, and that a number of different theologies can co-exist within the one post-Enlightenment, post-modern paradigm of a Christian theology.<sup>195</sup>

In 1970, when the Asian bishops gathered for the first time around Paul VI in Manila, they described the situation in Asia as “grave crises,” and sought to discover new ways through which they may be of greater and more effective service to both Catholic communities and other people.<sup>196</sup> They stressed the necessity of the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor, and this marked the beginning of a paradigm shift in the Catholic theological reflection in Asia.<sup>197</sup> From this momentous meeting the FABC’s theological project has gradually matured and become a well-developed theology which originally started with a recognition that Asian Churches were facing a crisis.<sup>198</sup> This fact seems to confirm Hans Küng’s contention that an important criterion for a new paradigm is the capacity to be aware

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<sup>192</sup> Hans Küng, “A New Basic Model for Theology: Divergencies and Convergencies,” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 439-452.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 444-5.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 452. See also Hans Küng, “Islam: Radical Changes in History – Challenges of the Present,” *Concilium* 5 (2005) 98.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>196</sup> “Asian Bishops’ Meeting,” art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 3.

<sup>197</sup> “Asian Bishops’ Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. I*, 3-10.

<sup>198</sup> FABC II, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. I*, 31.

of crises and to cope with them.<sup>199</sup> The FABC's theology also does not represent a total break with the tradition as its documents constantly refer to the teachings of Vatican II and papal magisterium. Küng has stressed this point arguing that "in every paradigm change, despite all discontinuity, there is a fundamental continuity."<sup>200</sup> At this stage, it is still too early to assess the full impact of this paradigm shift on the Asian Churches, however, signs of this change have been identified as local Churches and their members continue to be challenged to reinvent themselves.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the imperative of contextualisation in theology highlighting the dynamics between *traditum* as the deposit of faith and *tradendum* as the duty to communicate the Christian message in a manner that is sensitive to a particular context. As a contextual theology par excellence, the FABC's theology, while displaying several characteristics of the transcendental model, is best understood in terms of the synthetic model, which incorporates the salient features of all three models of anthropological, praxis, and translation, and hence keeps in balance four key elements of contextual theology, viz. Gospel, tradition, culture and social change. Underlying the FABC's theological methodologies is a pastoral and contextual process, which consists of an exposure to and an analysis of contextual realities (See), a reflection and discernment in light of the Gospel and tradition (Judge), and a planning of responses and concrete actions (Act). This contextual methodology translates into the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach, or "communion process," to address the needs and aspirations of basic ecclesial communities and lay people in the Church. Theology, the bishops of Asia insist, must be a service to life.

Taken as a whole, the FABC's theology constitutes a theological "event" for the Churches in Asia, and its impact on the Asian Church and Asian Christians continues to be more discernible. While the transition from one paradigm to the next is not always clear-cut, there are increasing signs that the FABC's theology, as faith seeking

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<sup>199</sup> Hans Küng, "A New Basic Model for Theology: Divergencies and Convergencies," in *Paradigm Change in Theology: a Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 444-5; Küng, "Paradigm Change in Theology: A Proposal for Discussion," 20.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 29.

triple dialogue, has instituted a paradigm change in theological reflection as the bishops reflect and respond to the growing crisis inherent in the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*. As this theology is still evolving, it is difficult to encapsulate it in an encompassing framework of understanding. However, it is possible to make some preliminary observations as to its major features. As an Asian contextual theology, it has a predominantly pastoral and missionary orientation, aims to build up the local Church, is liberative, prophetic, and committed to all things human, encourages a theological pluralism, and has harmony as a goal. But, first and foremost, it is both a faith seeking understanding through discerning the signs of the times, and a faith intent on engaging in a triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions and the poor of Asia.

## CHAPTER 4

### FEATURES OF THE FABC'S THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY (1970-2001)

#### 4.1 Introduction

Lay people have always played a vital role in the life and activity of the Church, but never become so much a subject of theological reflection as it is today. In Asia, where Christians are only a tiny minority, their vocation and mission have been one of the primary concerns in the mind of the Asian Bishops who have devoted an entire plenary assembly to the subject and regularly reflected on its themes in the overall context of evangelisation.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, for them, the age of lay people has dawned upon the Churches in Asia.<sup>2</sup> Chapter two has revealed how in different periods of Church history different concepts and roles of the laity were predominant. In this chapter we will examine the distinctive concept and role of lay people in the documents of the Asian bishops, and provide a detailed analysis of the elements and developments of their theology of the laity from 1970 to 2001.<sup>3</sup> We will emphasise the centrality of the concept of “priesthood of life,”<sup>4</sup> and argue that there is both fundamental continuity and gradual development in the FABC’s theology of the laity. Specifically, in the first

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<sup>1</sup> FABC IV, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 177-198. At the “First Asian Laity Meeting” held in 1994, the FABC observed that “there has been a deepened awareness of the vital role of the laity in the life and mission of the Church in the last 30 years.” OL, “The Commitment of the Laity in the Church’s Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings: Final Report on the First Asian Laity Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 119; [FABC], “Final Statement of the First Asian Laity Meeting,” in *The First Asian Laity Meeting: 4-9 September 1994, Korea*, [edited by] Pontifical Council for the Laity, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Laity, [and] Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea, ([Seoul]: Pontifical Council for the Laity, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Laity, Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea, 1994) 255. The Asian bishops acknowledge that “the contribution by countless numbers of the laity to the life of faith among the People of God in Asia cannot be measured.” FABC IV, art. 2.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

<sup>2</sup> OL, “Fifth East Asian Regional Laity Meeting,” art. 1.3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 93.

<sup>3</sup> This analysis is based on the important documents of the FABC issued from 1970 to 2001, published in three volumes: *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1, edited by G.B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference, Documents from 1992 to 1996*, vol. 2, edited by Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1997 to 2001*, vol. 3, edited by Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.



section, we examine the identity of lay people, their vocation, mission, ministries, and spirituality. We also summarise the FABC's theology of the laity in an ecosystem to highlight its key tenets and theological approach in the context of the challenges of Asia. In the second section, we discuss the development of the FABC's theology of the laity over a thirty-one-year period from 1970 to 2001. Besides a brief explanation of the terminologies and concepts used in the organisation and synthesis of its thought, this chapter is largely based on the FABC's own statements.

## **4.2 Elements of the FABC's Theology of the Laity**

Of all the documents of the FABC that deal with the question of laity and ministries, the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly on "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World of Asia," held from 16 to 29 September 1986, and the conclusions of the 1977 "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church" provide the most comprehensive treatment of these topics.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, focusing on these two statements, this section will discuss the identity of the laity, their vocation, mission, ministries, and spirituality.

### **4.2.1 Identity of the Laity**

In their official statements the FABC tends to use the terms "we," "us," or "our" to refer, first, to the participants in the various gatherings,<sup>6</sup> second, to the bishops themselves,<sup>7</sup> and third, to the entire people of God including bishops, priests,

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<sup>5</sup> FABC IV, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 177-98; ACMC, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 67-92.

<sup>6</sup> For example, "We, the participants of the Third Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences ...." FABC III, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55; "We, the participants of the first Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate ...." BILA I, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 235; "... we, the delegates to BILA III – bishops, priests, religious and lay people ...." BILA III, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 245.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in the final statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly, the FABC writes: "Therefore, we bishops of Asia have come together ... with laity, Religious and priests .... The gathering of ours with the laity ...." See FABC IV, arts. 2.1- 2.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 178; "We wish now to communicate to you the reflections that the laity, Religious and priests have shared with us ..." FABC IV, art. 4.8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 195; BIBA II, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 231.

religious, and lay people.<sup>8</sup> They often make this fourfold distinction of bishops, priests, religious and laity, though not always following this order, in the introductory paragraphs of their statements.<sup>9</sup> This is not the case with the first “Asian Bishops’ Meeting” in 1970 around Pope Paul VI, and the plenary assemblies held in 1974 and 1978, which identify the participants by the use of phrases such as “we, the bishops of Asia,”<sup>10</sup> “we, Bishops-delegate,”<sup>11</sup> and “we, the Bishops-delegate.”<sup>12</sup> The Third Plenary Assembly in 1982 simply uses the words “we, the participants,”<sup>13</sup> to acknowledge the contributions of other attendees besides the bishops. Indeed, a list of concerns raised by people attending the various workshops held in conjunction with this Plenary Assembly is accepted as an integral part of its final statements.<sup>14</sup> The laity as participants in a plenary assembly are explicitly mentioned in relation to the Fourth Plenary Assembly, immediately after the bishops, and followed by religious and priests in this order, no doubt implying the canonical lay status of the majority of the religious.<sup>15</sup> The Asian bishops employ the words “laity,” “lay people,” and their cognates to emphasise lay roles and responsibilities.<sup>16</sup> Yet, to date they have not provided an explicit definition of the laity. Rather, they have described lay people in

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<sup>8</sup> For example, “the call for us Asian Christians ...” FABC IV, art. 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 191; “In a Church of communion, we, clergy as well as laity, ...” FABC IV, art. 4.7.1.1., *FAPA Vol. I*, 194.

<sup>9</sup> FABC IV, art. 2.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 178; FABC V, art. 1.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 274; FABC VI, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. II*, 1; see also the footnote to the Introduction of FABC VII, *FAPA Vol. III*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> ABM, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> FABC I, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> FABC II, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> FABC III, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 53.

<sup>14</sup> FABC III, “The ‘Syllabus of Concerns’ of the Plenary Assembly,” *FAPA Vol. I*, 63.

<sup>15</sup> FABC IV, art. 2.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 178. Lay people’s participation in various Bishops’ Institutes was acknowledged much earlier than FABC IV, e.g., BISA III in 1975, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 207; BIMA I in 1978, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 93; BIRA III in 1982, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 119. Here the FABC seems to adopt the definition of the 1983 Code of Canon Law (Canon 207), which defines the laity as the Christian faithful (*Christifideles*) who are not in holy orders: “By divine institution, among Christ’s faithful there are in the Church sacred ministers, who in law are also called clerics; the others are called lay people.” See *The Code of Canon Law*, new revised English Translation, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Canon Law Society (London: HarperCollins, 1997) 44.

<sup>16</sup> There are numerous instances in the Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly which discusses the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. See also “The Role of the Lay Faithful,” FABC V, art. 5.0, *FAPA Vol. I*, 282; “Ministries of Lay People,” in APMC, art. 54, *FAPA Vol. I*, 78.

the context of the whole community rooted in Asian realities, and stressed that it is in the Christian communities that people experience that they belong, and that “together they are the Church.”<sup>17</sup> For the Asian bishops, the sacraments of baptism and confirmation are the gateway to Christian discipleship and Church membership.<sup>18</sup> Discussing the messianic functions of lay people in the Asian context at the Fourth Plenary Assembly the bishops give an implicit description of the laity by making three interrelated distinctions in three successive paragraphs. First, with reference to the priestly function, the clergy are distinguished from the people of God in general, the faithful, the Christian disciple, and all Christians.<sup>19</sup> Second, in the framework of the prophetic office a distinction is drawn between the hierarchy and the whole community or people of God, and, between the leadership of the Church and the believing community or people of God.<sup>20</sup> Third, within the ambit of the royal function a clear and specific distinction is made between the leadership and the laity, while comparing their respective roles in the building up of the kingdom.<sup>21</sup> These dual references are presented in a tabular form in Figure 1 showing their hermeneutical polarity.<sup>22</sup> Viewed together, they approximate to a descriptive definition of the laity.

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<sup>17</sup> FABC V, arts. 3.3.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281.

<sup>18</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 197.

<sup>19</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>20</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>21</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>22</sup> For Kenan B. Osborne, hermeneutical polarity means that “one term cannot be understood without its correlative term.” See “The Meaning of Lay, Laity and Lay Ministry in the Christian Theology of Church,” *Antonionum* 63 (1988) 240. We note that in these comparative paragraphs the FABC did not mention the words “priest” or “religious” explicitly, but prefer to use the generic terms of clergy, hierarchy, and leadership. It is also worthwhile to recall Peter C. Phan’s insightful remarks on the distinction between the identity and mission of a layperson, a religious, and a member of the hierarchy based on their basic relationship with Christ, the Church, and the world. In his view, “each of these three categories enacts the mystery of Christ in the Church and in the world in a way distinct and appropriate to its state.... In the priestly state the Church and its *transcendent-mediating* mission is symbolized and realized; in the religious state the Church and its *transcendent-eschatological* mission is symbolized and realized; and in the state of the laity the Church and its *incarnating-recapitulating* mission is signified and realized. It is the same mission of being the sacrament of Christ in the world that is represented, manifested and made visible in three different states of life.” See “Possibility of a Lay Spirituality: a Re-examination of some Theological Presuppositions,” *Communio* 10:4 (1983) 384.

<b>Priestly Function</b>	Clergy	as distinct from	People of God, the Faithful, the Christian Disciple, all Christians
<b>Prophetic Function</b>	Hierarchy, Leadership	as distinct from	Whole Community, People of God, the Believing Community
<b>Royal Function</b>	Leadership	as distinct from	The Laity

Figure 1

According to the bishops of Asia, lay people are “Asian Christians,”<sup>23</sup> “disciples of Christ,”<sup>24</sup> “full-fledged members”<sup>25</sup> of the Church, “mature subjects and persons with dignity and freedom, with their gifts and powers as well as rights and responsibilities.”<sup>26</sup> Sometimes they employ the terms “Christ’s faithful”<sup>27</sup> and “Christians” to mean lay people, and also use “Christians” and “Christian laity” interchangeably.<sup>28</sup> At their First Asian Laity Meeting held in 1994 they referred to the laity as “Asian citizens and Christians.”<sup>29</sup> The laity’s Christian identity, formed by the following of Jesus, is rooted in the realities of Asia,<sup>30</sup> the world’s exploited market place, a theatre of conflict and division, a continent of suffering humanity, and at the

<sup>23</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>24</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.3.1, 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>25</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.5.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>26</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.2.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>27</sup> OL, “Second Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) General Assembly II, art. 4.3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> South Asia Bishops’ Meeting, “Christian Response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia,” art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> OL, “The Commitment of the Laity in the Church’s Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings: Final Report on the First Asian Laity Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 119; [FABC], “Final Statement of the First Asian Laity Meeting,” in *The First Asian Laity Meeting: 4-9 September 1994, Korea*, edited by Pontifical Council for the Laity, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Laity, [and] Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea ([Seoul]: Pontifical Council for the Laity, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Laity, Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea, 1994) 255.

<sup>30</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.8.2-4.8.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 195.

same time, a cradle of ancient cultures, a birthplace of great religions, and a continent awakening to new challenges and responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> In particular, several challenges of Asia are mentioned, namely, politics, the youth of Asia, Asian women, the family, the world of education, mass media, the world of work, social responsibilities in the world of business, and health services.<sup>32</sup> They are the signs of the times that the Churches in Asia must discern and respond in faith to discover the vocation and mission of the laity.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Vocation and Mission of the Laity

According to the FABC, Asian Christians, both laity and clergy, are called to a communion with Jesus and a communion of liberation.<sup>34</sup> In the Asian context, their vocation is to form a community of disciples, committed to Jesus the Liberator and united in the service of liberation.<sup>35</sup> As a liberating community they are called to move beyond the confines of their passive *modus vivendi* and become actively involved in the life and activity of the Church in response to the dynamic challenges of the world.<sup>36</sup> Only when the Churches become truly Asian, rooted in the peoples of Asia and in solidarity with their everyday life, is their bond of liberation strengthened.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in the Church and in the world of Asia, lay people are called to “live their discipleship” of Jesus by living the common priesthood of the faithful, which is the real “priesthood of life,” shared by all Christians.<sup>38</sup> They have assumed and continue to play a central role in the evangelising mission, and are called to share

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<sup>31</sup> FABC IV, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179-191.

<sup>32</sup> FABC IV, art. 1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.0.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>34</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.1-4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>35</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.1.1-4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>36</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.2.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>37</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>38</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.8.8, 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 197 and 192 respectively. Following Marie de la Trinité, H.M. Nicholas, and H.U. von Balthasar, G. Chantraine prefers to use the term personal priesthood of the faithful—“sacerdoce *personnel* des fidèles”—rather than the common priesthood, because through the common priesthood the faithful become “fils dans le Fils et ainsi personne” (“Le laïc à l’intérieur des missions divines,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 109 [1987] 341).

in Christ's mission according to their proper lay state in the Church.<sup>39</sup> Their call to holiness and consequently to the mission of the Church, is a demand of their Christian identity, which is based on their baptismal incorporation into Christ and in the Eucharist.<sup>40</sup> Facing an uncertain and challenging future in Asia the Asian bishops have turned to Jesus Christ to renew their vision of the mission of the Church.<sup>41</sup>

For the FABC, there are three priorities of mission.<sup>42</sup> Evangelisation is the highest priority in the mission of the Church followed by the imperative to serve the kingdom of God and the social question.<sup>43</sup> Evangelisation is a complex reality, encompassing many aspects such as "witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of the Kingdom, struggling along with those who strive for justice and peace, dialogue, sharing, inculturation, mutual enrichment with other Christians and the followers of all religions."<sup>44</sup> Its ultimate goal is the ushering in and establishment of God's kingdom, namely God's rule in the hearts and minds of people.<sup>45</sup> In this mission of the Church, lay people have their own assignment.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, they play a vital and irreplaceable role in the evangelising mission by proclaiming Jesus Christ through their life, work, and words.<sup>47</sup> This proclamation, the centre and primary element of "*the grace and task of evangelisation*," is strengthened and supported in Christian families, which make up the people of God.<sup>48</sup> The evangelising mission of the Church has become more urgent and decisive, and it needs to be actualised and contextualised

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<sup>39</sup> OE, "Evangelization among the Indigenous Peoples of Asia," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 213; FABC IV, art. 4.8.8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 197.

<sup>40</sup> BILA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>41</sup> APMC, art. 21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> APMC, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 70.

<sup>43</sup> APMC, arts. 16-8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> BIMA IV, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

<sup>45</sup> BIMA IV, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

<sup>46</sup> BILA III, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 243.

<sup>47</sup> BIMA IV, art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 293.

<sup>48</sup> BIMA IV, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292; BIMA III, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104; BIMA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104.

in the Asian realities.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Asian Churches must discern the signs of the times as signs addressed to them by Jesus, and as signs of the Spirit's active presence in the world.<sup>50</sup> In the context of Asian societies, the mission of the Church, and hence of the laity, is Christ-centred, kingdom-focused, world-oriented, liberative, and dialogical.

In this section we will provide only a brief explanation of these concepts, as they will be explicated in greater detail in chapters 6 and 7, which explore the ecclesiological foundations for the FABC's theology of the laity. First, in the context of the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly, Christ-centred means that the disciples follow and reproduce Jesus in their lives, and in particular, in his threefold office of Priest, Prophet and King. As the Asian bishops employ the terms "messianic mission" and "messianic functions" only in the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly, and make an explicit reference to the triple mission of Jesus in the context of liberation,<sup>51</sup> it seems likely that they want to employ these terms in a Christological sense to emphasise the meaning of the Hebrew word *messiah*, or the Greek equivalent *christos*, which means "the anointed," a title applied to various figures in the Old Testament, especially, priests, prophets, and kings.<sup>52</sup> Second, the phrase "Kingdom of God," or the more biblical concept of reign of God, has often been used

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<sup>49</sup> APMC, art. 24, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 71-2.

<sup>50</sup> APMC, art. 21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 71.

<sup>51</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.3, 4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>52</sup> Citing L. Schick's study into the origin and use of the threefold ministry schema, Hervi Rikhoef notes that this framework "has been used Christologically in order to explain the name 'Christ'. This use occurred in the patristic period and the Middle Ages and can be found in the *Catechismus Romanus* of the Council of Trent. It was also used in the context of the doctrine of redemption to express the functions of Christ." See "The Competence of Priests, Prophets and Kings: Ecclesiological Reflections about the Power and Authority of Christian Believers," *Concilium* 197 (1988) 58. For Donald J. Goergen, the threefold ministry approach has "a biblical basis in the naming and proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. As the 'Anointed One of Israel', Jesus sums up within himself all the anointed ones of Israel. The prophets (1 Kgs 19:16; Sir 48:8), the priests (Exod 29:7; Lev 8:10), and the kings (1 Sam 10:1; 16:12-13) were anointed messiahs in the sense in which that would have been understood early in Israelite history.... There is a theological sense in which Jesus as Messiah came to be understood as having incorporated into his ministry dimensions of priesthood, prophecy, and kingship" ("Priest, Prophet, King: The Ministry of Jesus Christ," in *The Theology of Priesthood*, edited by Donald J. Goergen and Ann Garrido [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 190). It is worth noting that, according to I. De La Potterie, in the New Testament there was no connection between the theme of anointment and the title of "Christ" (anointed), and "le véritable et, en un sens, l'unique contexte où le Nouveau Testament parle de l'onction du Christ, c'est celui du baptême." See "L'onction du Christ," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 80 (1958) 251, 250 respectively. In his view, the explanation of the name of "Christ" by way of the threefold ministry was the result of a later theology (la théologie postérieure). *Ibid.*, 250-1.

interchangeably, in an anthropological, ethical, and historical sense to stress the duty of the Christian community to infuse the world with the values of the kingdom, such as “justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood.”<sup>53</sup> Third, the term “world” encompasses the familial, social, professional, political, economic, religious, and cultural spheres.<sup>54</sup> Fourth, the concept of “dialogue” is a leitmotiv that underlies the entire corpus of the FABC’s literature, and it has a threefold orientation: dialogue with cultures (inculturation),<sup>55</sup> dialogue with religions (interreligious dialogue) and dialogue with the poor (development and liberation). Finally, the liberative feature, which is associated with social justice and social change, implies the idea of transforming the world, and the structures of injustice and economic dependence that oppress the poor people in Asia.<sup>56</sup> This brief overview of the main characteristics of lay mission will serve as a preamble to the following presentation of the FABC’s view on the role of the Asian laity.

First, the Asian bishops remind Christian communities that Jesus envisions his mission as priestly, prophetic and pastoral,<sup>57</sup> and he is the messianic leader who leads the Church in the journey to liberation.<sup>58</sup> In this journey of life, it is the duty of all Christian disciples to reproduce Christ in their life by sharing his vision, adopting his behaviour, and sustaining themselves through his word and sacraments.<sup>59</sup> They actualise their baptismal discipleship by exercising the triple function in the concrete

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<sup>53</sup> FABC V, art. 1.7, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 275; FABC IV, arts. 3.1.2, 3.2.3, 4.8.7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 180, 182, 196.

<sup>54</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.7-8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 196-7.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Schineller makes a helpful remark that “inculturation takes seriously the *who*, the *where*, the *with whom* and *for whom* one does theology and one builds church. In fact, the local community ideally should become the maker of theology, a theology that is in dialogue with the larger Church, but one that speaks God’s word for that particular cultural situation” (“Inculturation as the Pilgrimage to Catholicity,” *Concilium* 204 [August 1989] 99).

<sup>56</sup> The editors of International Catholic Weekly *The Tablet* note that “social justice has a long Catholic pedigree, with the term first coined by the Jesuit Luigi Taparelli in the 1840s, and later being expressed more fully in Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in which he emphasised that society should be based on cooperation rather than class conflict.” See “Towards Justice and Dignity,” *The Tablet* (30 September 2006) 2.

<sup>57</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.3.1, 4.4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.



realities of Asia.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in the Asian context, it is an urgent task of the whole people of God, including the clergy, to live the common priesthood of the faithful by reproducing in everyday life the mysteries of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.<sup>61</sup> The prophetic function is a witness and a service of the whole community to the saving truth of Christ, and not just limited to the teaching function of the hierarchy.<sup>62</sup> The pastoral function, which is intimately linked to the baptismal priesthood of life, is to be understood as the duty of the entire community to build up the kingdom of God, and not only as the basis for the hierarchy's ministry of governance.<sup>63</sup>

This pastoral focus on the kingdom of God is the second feature of the mission of lay people in the documents of the FABC, who affirm that the laity participate in their own way in the building up of the kingdom through their actions within and outside the Church.<sup>64</sup> In the fast changing societies of Asia, lay people are called to actively participate in the mission of the Church by being both a sign of the reign of God and a leaven in the world.<sup>65</sup> Their mode of mission may vary depending on the social context, but fundamentally, it is a mission of triple dialogue by "witnessing to the values of the Gospel, in order to make the reign of God present in a non-Christian milieu, in secularised society, and especially in places where so much misery and poverty abound."<sup>66</sup> This focus on the kingdom provides new insights into the mission of the laity in the world.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192; Office of Laity and the Catholic Council of Lay Organizations in Thailand, "The Role of the Laity in Church Mission in South East Asia with Special Emphasis on Implementing the Church's Social Teachings," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 130.

<sup>61</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.4.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 2.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

<sup>66</sup> BILA III, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>67</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

Indeed, the third feature of the mission of lay people is its orientation to the world, a term which encompasses the familial, social, professional, and political dimensions of human life.<sup>68</sup> For the bishops, lay apostolate still remains “parish-oriented, inward-looking and priest-directed.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, it has to change its focus and become “outward – and forward – looking” due to the demand of Asian realities.<sup>70</sup> As an inward-looking community does not fulfil its mission,<sup>71</sup> lay people should initiate and direct newer forms of lay ministries in response to the needs of the local situation.<sup>72</sup>

Fourthly, in the theology of the FABC, the mission and ministries of lay people are linked to the triple dialogue with the cultures (inculturation), the religions (interreligious dialogue) and the poor of Asia (liberation/human development).<sup>73</sup> Dialogue is their mode of mission because their discipleship is rooted in Christ, in the community, and in the Asian context.<sup>74</sup> It is understood as a dialogue of life as they witness to Christ in their cultural environment, their religious traditions, and their socio-economic situation.<sup>75</sup> A commitment to cultural and inter-religious dialogue, coupled with a preferential, but not exclusive, option for the poor, is a major thrust of the lay mission.<sup>76</sup> Inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and the preferential option for

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<sup>68</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 197.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 4.3.2, 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192-4.

<sup>71</sup> BILA III, art. 6.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 237.

<sup>72</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194.

<sup>73</sup> FABC I, arts. 12-24, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14-6; FABC VII, Part I.A.8, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4, 8. Jacques Dupuis reminds us that “interreligious dialogue was hardly spoken of before the Second Vatican Council” (“The Church’s Evangelizing Mission in the Context of Religious Pluralism,” *The Pastoral Review* 1:1 [2005] 20). For Francis A. Sullivan, “John Paul II is the first pope to recognize interreligious dialogue as a ‘part’ and ‘expression’ of the Church’s evangelization” (“The Evangelizing Mission of the Church,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 241).

<sup>74</sup> BILA on Women II, art. 3.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 75.

<sup>75</sup> BIMA I, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 94; FABC IV, art. 3.1.11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 181.

<sup>76</sup> BILA III, arts. 11, 10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 245; BIMA II, art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 100. For Gustavo Gutiérrez, the word “preferential” has “a very important meaning, because we cannot overlook the universality of God’s love. The big challenge is to keep together the two aspects of *universality* (meaning that no-one can be excluded from our love), and *preference* for the last ones, the insignificant persons” (“The Church of the Poor,” *The Month* [July 1989] 266).

the poor are part and parcel of any Church's activity.<sup>77</sup> Together with proclamation they are just different aspects of one reality.<sup>78</sup> These ministries should be world-oriented and channelled to address the priorities of human development and promotion of justice in the region, and not just limited to Church-oriented functions.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, the FABC affirms that Asian Christians are called to become the instruments of Jesus in his work of liberation.<sup>80</sup> But to become effective agents of liberation they will need to activate the spiritual character and functions received through baptism.<sup>81</sup> They also must act as an evangelising and liberating force in the struggle for the fullness of life,<sup>82</sup> which involves the task of transforming the Asian realities in order to build up the kingdom of God.<sup>83</sup>

To fulfil this mission, local Churches have to discover their own types and structures of ministry that are suitable for their context.<sup>84</sup> At the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church held in 1977, the FABC discussed ways to make ministries more relevant and better suited to the needs of local people and particular Churches.<sup>85</sup> In its view, most of the needs for service in the Asian context can be met effectively by calling on lay people with special charisms to exercise ministries.<sup>86</sup> Lay people who perform these ministries will exercise in a public manner some aspects of the Christian's triple function of priest, prophet and pastor.<sup>87</sup> Their ministries in the context of the challenges of Asia will be discussed in the next section.

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<sup>77</sup> FABC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8

<sup>78</sup> BIRA IV/12, art. 51, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 333.

<sup>79</sup> BILA II, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 241.

<sup>80</sup> FABC IV, art. 1.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>82</sup> FABC VI, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2; FABC IV, art. 4.8.7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 196

<sup>83</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.7, 4.8.10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 196-7.

<sup>84</sup> APMC, art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 72.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 68.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 53-4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 78.

<sup>87</sup> APMC, art. 54, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 78.

### 4.2.3 Challenges of Asia and Ministries of the Laity

For the FABC, the Church can only respond adequately and meaningfully to the enormous challenges of the Asian milieu through a diversity of ministries, which will emerge gradually according to the needs of a particular community.<sup>88</sup> By way of example the Asian bishops list a number of lay ministries such as “Evangelist,”<sup>89</sup> “Catechist – Preacher – Religion Teacher,”<sup>90</sup> “Ministry for Liturgy and Liturgical Animation – Prayer Leaders – Acolyte – Lector – Cantor,”<sup>91</sup> “Ministry of Family Apostolate,”<sup>92</sup> “Ministry of Healing – Health Services – Health Education – Counselling,”<sup>93</sup> “Ministry of Inter-religious Dialogue,”<sup>94</sup> “Ministry of Social Concern – Social Leaders – Community Service Peace Officers – Peacemakers,”<sup>95</sup> “Ministry for Youth – University Students – High School Students – Campus Leaders,”<sup>96</sup> “Ministries to Workers – Farmers – Other Occupations,”<sup>97</sup> “Ministry for Education, Formal and Non-formal – Adult Education – Social Education – Literacy,”<sup>98</sup> “Community Builders – Community Leaders – Presidents of Rural Communities – Basic Community Leaders – Organizers – Rural Leaders – Rural Development Workers,”<sup>99</sup> “Ministries of Communication – Mass Media – Group Media,”<sup>100</sup> and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., arts. 53, 57, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 78-99.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., art. 58, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 79.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., art. 59, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 79.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., art. 60, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 79.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., art. 61, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 79.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., art. 62, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 79.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., art. 63, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 80.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., art. 64, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 80.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., art. 65, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 80.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., art. 66, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 80.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., art. 67, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 80.

<sup>99</sup> ACMC, art. 68, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 80.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., art. 69, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 81.

“Ministry of Pastoral Community Leadership.”<sup>101</sup> At the Fourth Plenary Assembly in 1986, the FABC identified nine challenges that require specific ministries of the laity: politics, youth, women, family, education, mass media, work, business, and health services. Politics is their first pastoral priority because

[t]he impact of misguided and selfish power politics on the reality of Asia today in the form of the massive poverty and degradation is beyond imagining. Today’s Asia has spawned structures and relationships in the political and economic community that are widening the gap between rich and poor, denying to the latter a fair and just access to the resources of the earth. Repression, oppression and exploitation are realities that result from the greed of vested interests and political power. Ethnic, cultural and linguistic conflicts which unleash violence, death and destruction are also linked with economic and political divisions. The political situation in many Asian countries has become so volatile, and a sense of insecurity permeates particularly the minority groups.<sup>102</sup>

The task of the whole people of God, including lay people, is to engage in politics, understood as a purposeful activity seeking the common good, to infuse the kingdom values of love and justice into the political, economic, cultural, and social world of Asia. Their participation in politics, as a faith witness and a leaven in the world, is a duty that flows from the secular character of their Christian identity and the imperative of the Gospel.<sup>103</sup> It is from inside the political machinery that they can effectively influence the philosophies, programs, and activities of political parties and personalities for the common good in the light of the Gospel.<sup>104</sup> Their ministry is to transform society in politics and the workplace, the pre-eminent places where their involvement has not yet been strong as compared to education and social welfare.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., art. 70. *FAPA Vol. 1*, 81.

<sup>102</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

<sup>103</sup> BILA IV, art. 8.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 297; OL, “Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church: Final Message: Third East Asian Regional Laity Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 99; FABC IV, arts. 3.1.2-3.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 180.

<sup>104</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.1.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 180.

<sup>105</sup> OL, “Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 99; OL, “Second Asian Laity Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, art. 3.5, 115.

Young people who constitute the majority of Asia's population are the second challenge addressed by the Fourth Plenary Assembly.<sup>106</sup> Their situation which mirrors the manifold problems of Asia, is both negative and positive.<sup>107</sup> On the negative side, many of them are living in extremely poor conditions, worsened by their lack of education and training, and hence become vulnerable to the temptations of materialism, consumerism, ideologies, and destructive substitutes such as drugs, alcoholism, and suicide.<sup>108</sup> On the positive side, they live their lives in witness to the values of the kingdom, and play an important role in social transformation endeavours.<sup>109</sup> Other members of the Church must provide them with full support and trust, and empower them to become evangelisers and instruments of God.<sup>110</sup> The Asian youth are the Asia of today, and if the Church wants to transform this continent of the young, it must become in a certain sense a "Church of the young."<sup>111</sup>

The third challenge faced by the FABC is Asian women, who make up half of the population of Asia.<sup>112</sup> They have suffered enormously from exploitation, degradation, dehumanisation, and many injustices due to discrimination inherent in traditional mores and new economic situations.<sup>113</sup> Their tragic realities now cry out for transformation.<sup>114</sup> However, there is a genuine appreciation of Asian women who are considered to be the heart of the family.<sup>115</sup> They have made numerous contributions in many professions, and in the Church, their contribution is significant in a variety of ministries, especially in person-oriented ministries due to their special capacity to love

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<sup>106</sup> According to FABC IV, "Of the total population, 60% are between 15 and 24 years of age." See art. 3.2.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 181.

<sup>107</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.2.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 181.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.2.2, *FAPA Vol. I*, 182.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.2.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 182.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.2.4, *FAPA Vol. I*, 182.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.2.5, *FAPA Vol. I*, 182.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.3.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 183.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 182.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 182.

<sup>115</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.3.2, *FAPA Vol. I*, 183.

and give life, and their receptive, sensitive and reflective attitude.<sup>116</sup> Based on “their fundamental equality in the Church’s universal ministeriality,”<sup>117</sup> they must be recognised as full partners, and allowed to play their rightful role in the world and in the Church.<sup>118</sup> All members of the Church have a special responsibility to uphold and defend the dignity of women, and to change attitudes, policies, practices, and legislation that lead to the discrimination against, and repression of, women.<sup>119</sup>

The fourth and perhaps the greatest pastoral concern in the minds of the FABC is the Christian family, which is both the cellular receptacle of all social and economic problems plaguing the Asian society,<sup>120</sup> and the domestic Church, where evangelisation initially takes place and a civilisation of love begins.<sup>121</sup> The Asian family is thus both evangelised and called to evangelise others.<sup>122</sup> To ensure that this double gift and task continues to prosper in the family is one of the most urgent ministries of lay people in Asia.<sup>123</sup>

The world of education in Asia, the fifth challenge addressed by the Fourth Plenary Assembly, is characterised by two observations, the illiteracy of the majority of Asians, and the high visibility and reputation of Catholic educational institutions.<sup>124</sup> Catholic schools must reflect the Church’s preferential option for the poor,<sup>125</sup> and act as vehicles of social change.<sup>126</sup> Teachers must consider teaching as a call from God and a formation in values, and not simply as a communication of knowledge.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., art. 3.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 183; *ACMC*, art. 90, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 83.

<sup>117</sup> *ACMC*, art. 89, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 83.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., art. 93, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 84; *FABC IV*, art. 3.3.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 183.

<sup>119</sup> *FABC IV*, art. 3.3.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 183.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., art. 3.4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 184.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., arts. 3.4.8-3.4.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 185.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., art. 3.4.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 185.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., art. 3.4.10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 185.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., art. 3.5.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 185.

<sup>125</sup> *FABC IV*, art. 3.5.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 185.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., art. 3.5.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 185.

Mass media rank sixth in the list of challenges confronting the Asian bishops, who observe that the Church lags behind consumer industries in taking advantage of the powerful means of proclaiming the liberating Gospel to Asian people.<sup>128</sup> Lay people in Asia are called to evangelise through the mass media,<sup>129</sup> because the Church “must reach out to millions struggling for social transformation.”<sup>130</sup>

In the world of work, the seventh challenge of Asia, workers participate in God’s own ongoing process of recreating and transforming the world.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, it is of utmost importance that they retrieve the religious meaning of human work as an expression of human creativity and a participation in the work of the Creator.<sup>132</sup> Asian Christians, especially business people, government officials, managers and policy makers, have to listen with compassion to the problems of the poor and needy workers, and to cooperate with other groups in society to transform exploitative and oppressive work systems.<sup>133</sup>

In this context, lay people in the world of business, the eighth challenge of Asia, are called to live out their faith in accordance with Gospel values and in consideration of the needs of others.<sup>134</sup> This faith witness can range from a simple action based on the values of truth, justice, and love to an active participation in transforming the social structure to achieve “greater worker participation, more discerning consumer guidance, more responsible interventions by governments and a more equitable society.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., art. 3.5.5, *FAPA Vol. I*, 186.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., art. 3.6.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 187.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., art. 3.6.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 186.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., art. 3.6.6, *FAPA Vol. I*, 187.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., art. 3.7.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 187.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., art. 3.7.4, *FAPA Vol. I*, 188.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., arts. 3.7.8, 3.8.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 189.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., art. 3.8.5, *FAPA Vol. I*, 190.

<sup>135</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.8.5, *FAPA Vol. I*, 190.



Health services are the ninth challenge facing the Church but more particularly the laity engaged in the provision of medical services. Here, the issues range from the application of modern medicine to significant bioethical problems.<sup>136</sup> Hence, lay people have to improve their understanding of the moral dimension of modern medicine and its practice.<sup>137</sup> Their ministry is to bring the saving power of God to transform the world of health care, and in particular, it must reach out to farmers, workers, and the landless and slum dwellers.<sup>138</sup> These nine ministries of the laity are the concrete expressions of an authentic Christian discipleship, which is intimately linked to lay spirituality. In contrast to the traditional neglect of the subject,<sup>139</sup> the FABC has paid special attention to lay spirituality, a topic that will be examined in the next section.

#### 4.2.4 Lay Spirituality

For the FABC, the entire people of God share “one Christian spirituality,”<sup>140</sup> which has six features. First, it is incarnated in Asian realities.<sup>141</sup> Second, it is Christocentric and animated by the Holy Spirit.<sup>142</sup> Third, it is ecclesial and communitarian as Christian discipleship is lived in the community of the Church.<sup>143</sup> Fourth, it is biblical, nourished on the word of God.<sup>144</sup> Fifth, it is sacramental, based on the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, the summit and the source of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., art. 3.9.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 190.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., art. 3.9.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 190; see also BILA II, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. I*, 240.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., art. 3.9.7, *FAPA Vol. I*, 191.

<sup>139</sup> For E. Sellner, “Christian spirituality has taken many forms throughout the centuries. One important form, consistently overlooked and unappreciated, is lay spirituality.” Quoted by Kees Waaijman in “Lay Spirituality,” *Studies in Spirituality* 10 (2000) 5.

<sup>140</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.8, *FAPA Vol. I*, 197.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., art. 4.8.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 195.

<sup>142</sup> FABC V, art. 9.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 288; FABC IV, art. 4.8.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 195.

<sup>143</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.4, *FAPA Vol. I*, 196.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., art. 4.8.5, *FAPA Vol. I*, 196.

Christian liturgy and spirituality.<sup>145</sup> Finally, it seeks to build up the kingdom of God in the concrete experiences of the social, political, economic, and cultural world of Asia.<sup>146</sup> This spirituality is an “involvement-spirituality,” bringing Gospel values to the various dimensions of Christian life, and embracing God’s plan for the whole creation.<sup>147</sup> It manifests itself in communion, solidarity, compassion, justice, love, and reconciliation with God the Father.<sup>148</sup> However, within this one Christian spirituality of discipleship and participation in Jesus’s mission,<sup>149</sup> a lay spirituality can be identified by its secular character and orientation to the world.<sup>150</sup> It is integrated with a life of authentic prayer, which is also a life of service and love, a self-gift to others, a way of proclaiming the Gospel, and a means of collaborating with the Holy Spirit in furthering the mission of the Church.<sup>151</sup> This spirituality, which entails the duty to

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., art. 4.8.6, *FAPA Vol. I*, 196.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., art. 4.8.7, *FAPA Vol. I*, 196. Peter C. Phan shares this view noting that, as a way of living, Christian spirituality has four characteristics: “theocentric (relationship with God), Christic (mediated by and modelled after Christ), pneumatological (empowered by the Spirit) and ecclesial (realized in and through the Church.” See “Christian Social Spirituality: A Global Perspective,” in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, edited by Philomena Cullen, Bernard House and Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2007) 22.

<sup>147</sup> BISA VI, art. 18, *FAPA Vol. I*, 226; FABC IV, art. 4.8.8, *FAPA Vol. I*, 197.

<sup>148</sup> FABC V, art. 9.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 288; FABC IV, art. 4.8.7, *FAPA Vol. I*, 197. We suggest that, to some extent, the spirituality presented by the FABC can be described as a “Christian social spirituality,” a rich concept that was helpfully explicated by Peter C. Phan in “Christian Social Spirituality: A Global Perspective,” in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, edited by Philomena Cullen, Bernard House and Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2007) 22. It is also worth recalling Adolfo Nicolás’s observation that “the crisis of Christianity in Asia is global,” and “at the root and at the core of this global crisis lies *spirituality*” (“Christianity in Crisis: Asia. Which Asia? Which Christianity? Which Crisis?” *Concilium* 3 [2005] 66, 68). For the current Superior General of the Society of Jesus, “this crisis is a *crisis of credibility* that touches the whole evangelization enterprise: words do not match action; the received teachings do not change the life of the believers; rituals do not energize life; Christian professionals, politicians, public servants or even husbands do not seem to perform with greater honesty, fidelity or compassion than their Buddhist or Hindu counterparts.... In Asia we are in crisis because our message is not made visible in our life.” Ibid., 66. Father Nicolás, who spent more than forty years in Japan, believes that “‘real theology’ comes from ‘life experience’ of the laity.” See Robert Mickens, “In the Steps of Ignatius—and Arrupe,” *The Tablet* (26 January 2008) 6. He was no doubt influenced by the “non-monastically lay apostolic spirituality” developed by Ignatius when he was still “a layman with absolutely no idea of seeking priestly ordination.” Aloysius Pieris, “Vatican II: Glimpses into Six Centuries of Its Prehistory,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 44:4 (2007) 311-2.

<sup>149</sup> For Keith J. Egan, “A spirituality of discipleship is the lived experience of following Jesus under the influence of the Holy Spirit” (“The Call of the Laity to a Spirituality of Discipleship,” *The Jurist* 47 [1987] 75).

<sup>150</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.8, *FAPA Vol. I*, 197.

<sup>151</sup> FABC II, art. 27, *FAPA Vol. I*, 34. For Peter C. Phan, the Asian Christian spirituality involves an ecclesial task of realising the Church’s mission. See “Asian Christian Spirituality: Context and

transform the Asian world in the Spirit of the Gospel,<sup>152</sup> encapsulates the main elements of the FABC's theology of the laity, which will be summarised in a schematic form in the following section.

### **4.3 Ecosystem of the FABC's Theology of the Laity**

The oversimplified ecosystem presented here aims to provide some clarity, and is not meant to do justice to the richness of the FABC's theology of the laity. It summarises the salient features of the FABC's theology of the laity by highlighting the challenges of Asia, the theological methodologies employed by the Asian bishops (discussed in Chapter 3), the centrality of the concept of priesthood of life, and the mission of lay people as both a triple function and a triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia.

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Contour," *Spiritus* 6 (2006) 225. In this inspiring paper Phan provides an adroit and penetrating exploration of the links between the Asian Christian spirituality and the FABC's triple dialogue, namely, interreligious dialogue, liberation, and inculturation. Ibid, 221-7.

<sup>152</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.10, *FAPA Vol. I*, 197; BILA II, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. I*, 240.

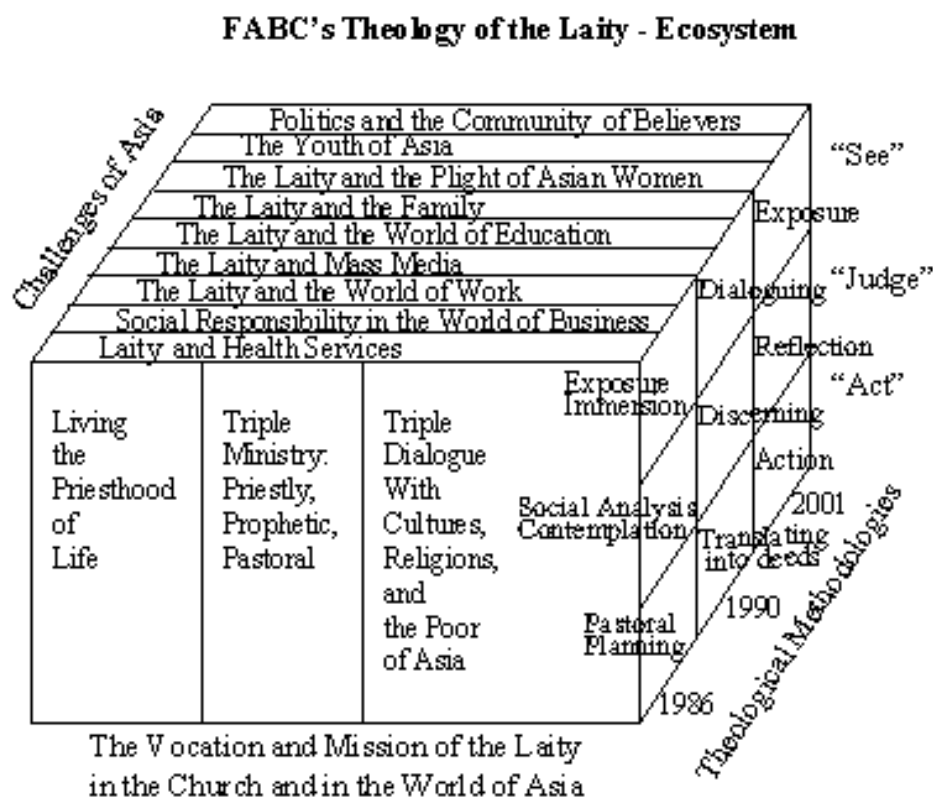


Figure 2

First, the list of “Challenges of Asia” is taken from the statements of Fourth Plenary Assembly held in 1986 on “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia.”<sup>153</sup> The Asian bishops consider “Politics and the Community of Believers” as the first of these challenges confronting the Church followed by the youth of Asia, Asian women, and the family. These challenges continue to be the FABC’s pastoral priorities in their subsequent theological deliberations.<sup>154</sup> At the Seventh Plenary Assembly held in 2000 they added “indigenous peoples, sea-based and land-based migrants, and refugees”<sup>155</sup> to the list of concerns that require their pastoral focus. Education, mass media, work, the world of business, and health services are other challenges facing the Asian Churches.

<sup>153</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179-91.

<sup>154</sup> FABC VI, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 10-2.

<sup>155</sup> FABC VII, Part III, A, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 9-11.

Second, in 1986 the FABC introduced a four-stage “Pastoral Cycle,” a theological and pastoral methodology, discussed in Chapter 3, to be followed in 1990 by another three-phase theological pastoral process of “*dialoguing* with the realities of Asia from within,” “*discerning* the movement of God’s Spirit in Asia,” and “*translating into deeds*” according to the Spirit’s biddings.<sup>156</sup> The FABC refers to these methods of theological reflection in other documents, especially in a comprehensive treatment in 2001 of the subject issued by their Office of Theological Concerns.<sup>157</sup> Underlying these theological methodologies is the simple discernment process of “see, judge, act” employed by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Third, the mission of lay people is essentially priestly, prophetic, and pastoral, modelled on the ministry of Christ, the leader of the Church.<sup>158</sup> It is linked to the triple dialogue with the religions, the cultures, and the poor of Asia.<sup>159</sup> It is also inseparable from the urgent duty of all Asian Christians to exercise the priestly function by living the priesthood of life, which has “its origins in Christ himself.”<sup>160</sup> As the challenges changed so did the Asian bishops’ view on lay people and their mission. The following section will endeavour to trace the development of their reflection on the role of lay people in the Asian context, from 1970, the date of their first meeting around Pope Paul VI in Manila, to 2001, the last year covered by the third of the three-volume collection, which contains all of the important documents issued by the FABC over this period of time.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> BISA VII, arts. 8-13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 231-2; FABC V, art. 7.1, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 284; OHD, “The Prophetic Path to the New Millennium Through Social Advocacy,” art. 3.14, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 50; see also FABC VI, art. A.3, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2.

<sup>157</sup> OL, “Second Asian Laity Meeting: Final Statement,” art. 4.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 115; OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” art 3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 356.

<sup>158</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.2.2-4.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>159</sup> BILA III, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>160</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>161</sup> *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1997 to 2001*, vol. 3, edited by Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002).

#### 4.4 Development of the FABC's Theology of the Laity

In the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly held in September 1986 the FABC admitted that “*in the past*” [emphasis added] they had channelled their efforts to support “an inward-looking” view of the Church, and now realised that they must reassess their priorities and resources to ensure that the Church become “an outward-looking” community.<sup>162</sup> This admission suggests a plausible division of the development of their theology of the laity into two periods marked by the Fourth Plenary Assembly, which was a culmination of the FABC’s theological reflection on the subject in the first phase from 1970 to mid-1986, and a change of emphasis in the second period from September 1986 to 2001. This shift of emphasis can be identified in five interrelated areas: its orientation to the world, its contextualisation of the role of the laity based on geographic regions, its emphasis on the empowerment for, and autonomy of, lay people, especially women and youth, its focus on an integral formation *of* and *for* the laity, in particular, the social teachings of the Church, and a deeper exploration of a spirituality of discipleship and a spirituality of harmony.

First, the statements of the FABC, issued in the first period, tend to emphasise the role of lay people in the Church as compared to those produced in the second phase, which show a more pronounced focus on their ministries in the world. Indeed, the 1977 conclusions of the “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church” place more emphasis on the *ad intra* aspects of ministries, discussing their background, context, forms, and formation, and their implications for the life and structure of the Church.<sup>163</sup> However, at the Fourth Plenary Assembly in 1986, the Asian bishops stressed the need to make ministries of lay people more world-oriented and kingdom-oriented because they realised that lay apostolate was still “parish-oriented, inward-looking and priest-directed.”<sup>164</sup> They reiterated this emphasis in other statements, especially those issued in subsequent plenary assemblies. The Church, they affirmed, has to balance the “efforts on inward looking concerns with concerns for social issues

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<sup>162</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>163</sup> APMC, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 67-92.

<sup>164</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194.

especially regarding workers, women and youth.”<sup>165</sup> Lay people should influence the world of business and politics, education and health, mass media and work, by being a servant of the Lord and a companion of all Asians in the journey aiming for full life in the kingdom of God.<sup>166</sup> Their duty is to witness to the values of the kingdom by promoting “justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood.”<sup>167</sup> This change of emphasis had already been signalled in other documents issued by the FABC in the two years immediately prior to the Fourth Plenary Assembly. The first and second Bishops’ Institute for the Lay Apostolate (BILA) in 1984 and May 1986 stress that, to fulfil its mission, the Church has to direct its ministries to the world and society, especially to justice and developmental priorities of the region.<sup>168</sup> The mission of lay people, says BILA III, is to witness to the values of the Gospel by dialoguing with Asians, especially the poor, in a non-Christian milieu and a secularised society.<sup>169</sup>

Secondly, since 1986 the FABC’s theology of the laity has become more contextualised with two Asian laity meetings held in 1994 and 2001: the first to discuss the mission of lay people with special reference to the social teachings of the Church, and the second, to reflect on both the Church’s social doctrines and the role of the laity as a moving force of love and service in a renewed Church.<sup>170</sup> Regional gatherings of laity were held in East Asia, South Asia, and South East Asia to study the social teachings of the Church in the context of their regional concerns. East Asia consists of Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Macau, and Taiwan; South Asia comprises Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; South East Asia includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The first East Asian regional meeting took place in Taipei in 1986 to discuss

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<sup>165</sup> BILA V, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 78.

<sup>166</sup> FABC VII, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4; see also “The Role of the Laity in Human Development,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 134.

<sup>167</sup> FABC V, arts. 1.7, 4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275, 282.

<sup>168</sup> BILA I, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 236; BILA II, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 241.

<sup>169</sup> BILA III, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>170</sup> OL, “The Commitment of the Laity in the Church’s Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings: Final Report on the First Asian Laity Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 119-25; OL, “Second Asian Laity Meeting: Final Statement,” art. 4.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 113-6.

“The Role of the Laity in the Local Churches of East Asia,” and it was followed by a second meeting in Tokyo in 1989 addressing the theme of “Spiritual Crisis amidst Material Affluence and the Role of the Laity.”<sup>171</sup> Three more East Asian regional laity meetings were held in 1992, 1996 and 1999 to examine the specific role of lay people in this region, dealing with issues that were more pertinent to East Asia such as the participation of the laity in the life of the Church in East Asia, their role in human development, and their formation towards a renewed Church.<sup>172</sup> Two South Asian regional meetings were held in 1995 and 1998 on the theme of the role and mission of lay people in a multi-religious context.<sup>173</sup> Between these meetings the bishops of South Asia also met to discuss the principles for a Christian response to the growing phenomenon of religious fundamentalism and violence in South Asia, and to emphasise the formation of lay leaders.<sup>174</sup> In South East Asia, two meetings were held in 1996 and 1999 to reflect on the role of the laity in the Church mission with special emphasis on human development and the social teachings of the Church.<sup>175</sup>

Thirdly, from 1986 on the Asian bishops increasingly emphasised the empowerment for, and the autonomy of, lay people in undertaking their ministries in the Church and in the world. The Fourth Plenary Assembly highlighted the need for developing collaborative Church structures to make full use of lay people’s talents and expertise.<sup>176</sup> The Fourth and Fifth Bishops’ Institute for Lay Apostolate in 1988 and 1991 searched for ways to restore to the laity their rightful place and role in the over-

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<sup>171</sup> OL, “Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church: Third East Asian Regional Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 97.

<sup>172</sup> OL, “Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church: Third East Asian Regional Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 97-100; “The Role of the Laity in Human Development,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 133-5; “Fifth East Asian Regional Meeting: Final Statement,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 93-6.

<sup>173</sup> OL, “Second South Asian Regional Laity Meeting (SARLM II),” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 83-7.

<sup>174</sup> “Christian Response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia: South Asia Bishops’ Meeting (SABIM),” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 13-8.

<sup>175</sup> OL, “The Role of the Laity in Church Mission in South East Asia with Special Emphasis on Implementing the Church’ Social Teachings,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 127-31; “Second Southeast Asian Regional Laity Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 89-92.

<sup>176</sup> FABC VII, art. Part 1,A.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4. Here the FABC might have in mind the collaborative model of ministry of the early Church, a theme that was investigated by Daniel J. Harrington who convincingly argues that “from the earliest times ministry in the Church was collaborative” (“Paul and His Co-Workers,” *Priests and People* [August-September 2003] 325). See also “The Collaborative Nature of the Pauline Mission,” *The Bible Today* 42:4 (July 2004) 200-6.



clericalised Churches in Asia.<sup>177</sup> The Fifth Plenary Assembly in 1990 emphasised that lay people are the primary evangelisers of cultures and societies.<sup>178</sup> The clergy have to be active in the formation of lay people to enable them to be “*evangelisers of their own* – the young evangelizing the young, workers evangelizing workers, professionals evangelizing professionals, government officials evangelizing government officials, families evangelizing families,” and to become a leaven for the transformation of Asian society.<sup>179</sup>

The FABC acknowledges that discrimination based on gender exists in the family, in economy, politics, culture, religion, and mass media,<sup>180</sup> and women want to be treated more equally in the Church.<sup>181</sup> The first Bishops’ Institute on Lay Apostolate on Women in 1995 formally recognises that women are co-evangelists, and active agents in their own transformation.<sup>182</sup> The FABC acknowledges that Catholic morality and spirituality are biased against women, and traditional Marian spirituality favours the docility of women.<sup>183</sup> To remedy this situation and to empower women, what is required is an inspiring reinterpretation and presentation of Mary as a true disciple, who listens to and acts on the Word of God in the public sphere.<sup>184</sup> At a colloquium held in 1997 to discuss their plans for the Churches in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Asian bishops considered it a priority to identify the key issues discriminating women in Asia and to promote the empowerment of women in the Church and in society.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> BILA IV, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 295; OESC, “A Renewed Catechesis for Asia Towards Year 2000 and Beyond,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 29; see also OTC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying in the Spirit into Fuller Life,” art. 52, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 227.

<sup>178</sup> FABC V, art. 5.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 283; OE, “Evangelization among the Indigenous Peoples of Asia,” art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 213.

<sup>179</sup> FABC V, arts. 5.1-5.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 283.

<sup>180</sup> OL and OHD, “Realities and Experiences of Women in Asia,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 114-5.

<sup>181</sup> OL, “Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 98.

<sup>182</sup> BILA on Women [I], “Role of Women in Church and Society Toward 2000,” art. 1.6, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 92.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.7, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 94.

<sup>184</sup> BILA on Women II, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 75; BILA on Women [I], “Role of Women in Church and Society Toward 2000,” art. 5.4, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 95.

<sup>185</sup> OHD, “Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” arts. 4.1.2-3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 37.

They proposed that women be invited to become members of theological commissions at national and FABC levels.<sup>186</sup> Between 1995 and 2001, three special Bishops' Institutes on Lay Apostolate on Women were held to address issues relating to the role of women in the Church and the world of Asia.<sup>187</sup>

At other forums, the FABC recommended that existing structures within the Church be reviewed and appropriate mechanisms be set up to enable women and youth to participate in the decision-making bodies of the Church.<sup>188</sup> To show their deep concern for women and youth they instructed that a women's commission and a youth office be established.<sup>189</sup> In 1997, the first Bishops' Institute on Lay Apostolate on Youth was held to discuss the ministry to Asian youth.<sup>190</sup> The FABC also stressed the need to impart Christian values in children and train them to be agents of change,<sup>191</sup> and held the first consultation on children in 2000.<sup>192</sup> For the FABC, women, youth, the family, as well as other sectors of people such as indigenous peoples, sea-based and land-based migrants, and refugees, are their pastoral priorities, and at the same time, equal partners in the mission of love and service.<sup>193</sup>

Fourthly, after the 1986 Plenary Assembly, there has been an increased emphasis in the FABC's reflection on the "formation *of* and *for* the laity."<sup>194</sup> Three meetings of the Bishops' Institute for Lay Apostolate were held to discuss the topic of lay

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<sup>186</sup> BILA on Women II, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 76; OL and OHD, "Realities and Experiences of Women in Asia," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 118.

<sup>187</sup> BILA on Women [I], *FAPA Vol. 2*, 91-6; BILA on Women II, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 73-7; BILA on Women III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 79-82.

<sup>188</sup> OL and OHD, "Realities and Experiences of Women in Asia," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 116; OHD, "Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," arts. 4.1.18-19, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 39.

<sup>189</sup> OL and OHD, "Realities and Experiences of Women in Asia," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 117; OHD, "Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," arts. 4.1.15, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 39; OL and OHD, "The Youth of Asia Envisioning the Fullness of Life and Human Dignity in the Church," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 104; OL, "Asian Youth Ministers' Meeting: A Consolidated Report," *FAPA Vol. 3*, 104.

<sup>190</sup> BILA on Youth, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 65-71.

<sup>191</sup> OHD, "Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," arts. 4.1.15, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 39.

<sup>192</sup> OE, "Consultation on 'Missionary Animation of Children'," *FAPA Vol. 3*, 214.

<sup>193</sup> FABC VII, art. III.A, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 9.

<sup>194</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.7.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194.

formation.<sup>195</sup> The FABC identify three levels of formation,<sup>196</sup> the first of which is a general formation of all Christians, in particular lay people, aiming to make them aware of the Second Vatican Council's teachings on their vocation and mission.<sup>197</sup> Special training seminars, weekend courses, and block courses for volunteers and selected leaders belong to the second level of formation,<sup>198</sup> while the third level is the ministerial formation designed for "those who enjoy the charisms for stable ecclesial service."<sup>199</sup> The Asian bishops' vision for the renewal of the Church is based on a holistic formation of the people of God, which emphasises that lay people's training must be accompanied by the formation of the clergy and religious to enable them to understand and accept the emerging role and responsibility of the laity.<sup>200</sup> They affirm that formation of the lay faithful is an ongoing process and must be placed among the priorities of a diocese.<sup>201</sup> At the Plenary Assembly in 1990, they called for a thorough education of Catholics in the social doctrines of the Church,<sup>202</sup> and repeated the same message at BILA VI in 1992,<sup>203</sup> and the First Asian Laity Meeting in 1994.<sup>204</sup>

In addition to this emphasis on the formation of lay people with special reference to the social teachings of the Church, the Asian bishops recognise the need for lay people to have ongoing formation, and in particular, adequate training "needed for the emerging ministries and for new way of being ministers."<sup>205</sup> They stress that lay

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<sup>195</sup> BILA V, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 77-80; BILA VI, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 81-85; BILA VII, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 87-90.

<sup>196</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.7.2.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.7.2.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.7.2.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194-5.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.7.2.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 195.

<sup>200</sup> OL, "The Commitment of the Laity in the Church's Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 121; BILA IV, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 297-8.

<sup>201</sup> BILA VI, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 77; BILA V, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 77.

<sup>202</sup> FABC V, art. 5.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 283.

<sup>203</sup> BILA VI, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 82.

<sup>204</sup> OL, "The Commitment of the Laity in the Church's Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 123; see also "The Role of the Laity in Human Development," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 134.

<sup>205</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 312; BILA IV, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 297.

formation must be adapted to the cultural contexts of Asia, and involve all members of the Church.<sup>206</sup> As a result of the review of the many programmes and methods that had been implemented, the FABC designed an integral formation process, which they termed “Asian Integral Pastoral Approach” (AsIPA) to promote a new way of being Church in Asia.<sup>207</sup> They devoted two general meetings in 1996 and 2000 to discuss the AsIPA methodology, which they considered to be a very useful means to make the Church a communion of communities and to develop basic ecclesial communities.<sup>208</sup> With an increased emphasis on the contextualised and integral formation of lay people, and a focus on the Church’s social teachings in the second period of their theological reflection on the lay experience, the FABC shifted more from a theology *of* the laity to a theology *for* the laity, a theology not focused on dealing with lay people as a subject of theological discussion, but aiming to empower them to assume their rightful role in the Church and in the world.

Finally, after 1986, the Asian bishops have further deepened their reflection on the spirituality of all Christians by emphasising that it is a spirituality of discipleship and a spirituality of harmony. First, this spirituality is a journey of authentic discipleship, love, and service in the context of Asia after the pattern of Jesus’ death and resurrection.<sup>209</sup> It is a “contextualized Christian spirituality” that discerns the movement of the Spirit who re-enacts in Christians the mysteries of Jesus Christ in the contextual realities of their daily life and struggles.<sup>210</sup> Second, it is a spirituality of harmony which expresses their intimate communion with God, their docility to his Spirit, and their following of Jesus-in-mission.<sup>211</sup> It integrates every aspect of Christian life: liturgy, prayer, community living, solidarity with all and especially the

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<sup>206</sup> FABC VII, art. C.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 13.

<sup>207</sup> OL, “Asian Integral Pastoral Approach towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia (AsIPA),” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 107-11.

<sup>208</sup> OL, “Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) Message to the Churches of Asia,” art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 139; FABC VII, art. III.C.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 15.

<sup>209</sup> FABC V, art. 9.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288; OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.2.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 308.

<sup>210</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.2.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 308.

<sup>211</sup> FABC V, arts. 9.1, 9.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288.

poor, evangelization, catechesis, dialogue, social commitment, etc.<sup>212</sup> It is a spirituality of the new way of being Church, a spirituality of those who trust in the Lord, a spirituality of the powerless and the *anawim*.<sup>213</sup> It is a spirituality that emphasises being over doing, and seeks to challenge the disharmonies of the Asian world by a life of simplicity, humble presence, and service.<sup>214</sup> As such, it is already a living proclamation of Christ, convincing, powerful, and far reaching in its impact.<sup>215</sup> The depth of this spirituality also prepares Christians for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.<sup>216</sup> At the Sixth Plenary Assembly in 1995, the FABC affirmed that in Asia, where peoples have long traditions of deep religiosity, prayer is absolutely indispensable because the inner life of prayer builds the Church into a credible community of faith, which, in turn, works for a fully human future of Asian peoples.<sup>217</sup> For the FABC, spirituality and social justice go hand in hand, and together they are the keys to the kingdom of God in the world of Asia.<sup>218</sup>

In sum, there was both a fundamental continuity and a gradual progression in the FABC's theology of the laity from 1970 to 2001, which displays a high degree of consistency and integration, coupled with discernible elements of growth.<sup>219</sup> This contextual theology, developed in response to the challenges of Asian societies, was increasingly manifested by an orientation to the world, a more regional contextualisation of the role of lay people, a move towards their empowerment and

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., art. 9.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., art. 9.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., arts. 9.5, 10.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288-9.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., art. 9.7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 289.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., art. 9.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 289.

<sup>217</sup> FABC VI, arts. 3, 14.1, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2, 8.

<sup>218</sup> OHD, "Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," art. 8.1., *FAPA Vol. 3*, 45.

<sup>219</sup> Our observation is inspired by the three selective principles highlighted by Gerard Vincent Hall in his work, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1994): first, the "principle of continuity" implies a "fundamental consistency of the themes, methods and approaches"; secondly, the "principle of growth" involves a "transformation and even rupture" of the interpretations and procedures; finally, the "principle of integration" is "more than the summation of these first two principles," and "recognises a certain *telos*" in the works produced over a period of time. Ibid., 3.

greater autonomy, a focus on their integral formation, and an emphasis on a deeper and more engaging spirituality of discipleship and harmony.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the elements of the FABC's theology of the laity and traced its development over a period of thirty-one years from 1970 to 2001. First, in the documents of the FABC, lay people first and foremost are Asian Christians, a contextual reality and constitutive part of the Church, the faithful, the disciples of Christ, the people of God, and the believing community. Their identity is based on the baptismal, common priesthood of life, characterised by the Asian secularity. Their calling is intimately bound to the vocation of local Churches where all Asian Christians are called to a contextualised communion by being committed to Jesus the Liberator and to live the priesthood of life in a communion of integral liberation. Their mission and ministries are essentially Christ-centred, kingdom-focused, world-oriented, liberative, and dialogical as they endeavour to actualise the priestly, prophetic, and pastoral functions in their faith response to the challenges of Asia. Fundamental to their vocation and mission are the two concepts of priesthood of life and contextualised communion, a common matrix for all Asian Christians which, intrinsically linked to their prophetic and pastoral functions, integrates both their *ad intra* role in the Church and their *ad extra* mission in the familial, professional, social, and political world. For the Asian bishops, the entire people of God is priestly, and its common priesthood of life, which has its origins in Christ himself, is more real and inclusive than the ministerial priesthood of the clergy.<sup>220</sup> It encompasses and harmonises two organising frameworks dynamically used by *Lumen Gentium*, namely the common priesthood and the triple mission of the Church. Mission is the purpose of lay ministries, which aim to transform the world by a triple dialogue of life with the

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<sup>220</sup> Gideon Goosen reminds us that "both priesthoods are analogical of the priesthood of Christ. Both mediate; both offer sacrifice; both are go-betweens" ("A New Relationship Between the Ministerial and Baptismal Priesthoods," *Compass* [Winter 1997] 21). For David N. Power, "the use of the word 'priesthood' in the conciliar documents lacks precision. Apart from associating it with the Church's sacramental ministry and eucharistic sacrifice, the council offered no precise definition of Christ's own priesthood, but seemed to take this as a given." See ("Priesthood Revisited: Mission and Ministries in the Royal Priesthood," in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) 91.

cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. Evangelisation is the highest priority of mission, and its goal is to build up the kingdom of God.

Secondly, there was both a fundamental continuity and a gradual development in the FABC's theology of the laity from 1970 to 2001. As the challenges of Asia changed so did the teachings of the FABC. Indeed, following the Fourth Plenary Assembly in 1986 its theology of the laity has become more world-oriented with an increased emphasis on the empowerment and the autonomy of lay people, on the contextualisation of the role of the laity based on geographic regions of Asia, on an integral and contextualised formation *of* and *for* the laity with a focus on the social teachings of the Church, and on a deeper exploration of a spirituality of discipleship and harmony. In this theology, the vocation and mission of lay people is constitutive of the life and activity of the Asian Church, which is called by Jesus to be a community of faith in Asia, a communion of committed disciples working for the liberation of Asia. Their priestly, prophetic, and pastoral ministries are based on the ministry of Jesus Christ who is their model and point of reference. There was no paradigm shift in the FABC's contextual theology of the laity from 1970 to 2001, only a change in emphasis in some areas of pastoral concerns. The following chapter will review the strengths and limitations of this rich and dynamic theology by examining of its context, contents, structures, and interaction with other post-Vatican II theologies of the laity.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE FABC'S THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY (1970-2001)

#### 5.1 Introduction

As the first Ecumenical Council where ecclesiology was the central theme, Vatican II has changed the Church,<sup>1</sup> and provided seminal insights into the various aspects of Church life and spirituality. One of its most significant contributions was the development of a new understanding of the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. The Council left an important body of texts about the laity (Chapters 2 and 4 of *Lumen Gentium*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Ad Gentes*), which became the foundation for the FABC's reflection on the identity and role of lay people in the Church in Asia. In 1974, nine years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, at their first plenary meeting, held to discuss the theme "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia," the Asian bishops declared that more and more lay people "must assume responsibility in the tasks of evangelisation."<sup>2</sup> In 2001, at the Second Asian Laity Meeting, they observed that "the world of politics and the workplace are the pre-eminent places where the laity are

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<sup>1</sup> For a series of discussions on this topic see John Wilkins, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 1: Earthquake in Rome," *The Tablet* (12 October 2002) 10-1; "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 2: Unfinished Business," *The Tablet* (19 October 2002) 10-2; Alain Woodrow, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 3: Diary of an Insider," *The Tablet* (26 October 2002) 11-3; Alberto Melloni, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 4: A Speech That Lit the Flame," *The Tablet* (2 November 2002) 7-8; Robert Blair Kaiser, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 5: Priest Behind the Scenes," *The Tablet* (9 November 2002) 8-9; John Bowden, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 6: Priest Behind the Scenes," *The Tablet* (16 November 2002) 10-1; John Marshall, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 7: My Voyage of Discovery," *The Tablet* (23 November 2002) 8-9; Joseph Komonchak, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 8: What Road to Joy?" *The Tablet* (30 November 2002) 11-2; John Allen, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 9: Earthquake in Rome," *The Tablet* (7 December 2002) 8-9; Michael Walsh, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 10: U-turn on Human Rights," *The Tablet* (14 December 2002) 7-9; Cardinal Franz König, "How Vatican II Changed the Church: 11: 'It Must Be the Holy Spirit'," *The Tablet* (21-28 December 2002) 4-6; see also *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, edited by John H. Miller (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1966); *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell, edited by Bonaventure Kloppenburg (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974); *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, 2 vols, edited by René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988); *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, edited by Adrian Hastings (London: SPCK, 1991); Dennis M. Doyle, *The Church Emerging from Vatican II: A Popular Approach to Contemporary Catholicism* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> FABC I, art. 36, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 17.



called to transform society.”<sup>3</sup> For them, “Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities offer the laity a way to link faith and life,”<sup>4</sup> help them grow in awareness of local situations, and through faith formation “develop a sense of mission and become a moving force to bring about conversation and change in Church and Society.”<sup>5</sup> Between these two meetings there was a deepening of FABC’s reflection on the role of lay people in the Church and in the world of Asia. Indeed, since Vatican II, in Asia as well as other parts of the Christian world, the theology of the laity has been brought into prominence. This was due to several factors including “a more comprehensive understanding of the mystery of the Church; a more positive sense of the secular world and the mission of the Church within it; new cultural and social conditions which significantly raised the educational level of the lay Christian.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the FABC’s theology of the laity, which is more than simply a canonical or administrative instrument, deserves a comprehensive review. In this chapter we will evaluate the FABC’s theology of the laity by examining its context, contents, structures, and interaction with other post-Vatican II theologies of the laity. Our main argument is that the concept of priesthood of life, common to all Asian Christians, and intimately connected to the notion of “contextualised communion,”<sup>7</sup> is central to the identity, vocation, mission, and spirituality of lay people in Asia. We also contend that this theology has a contextual and relational dimension, which is implicit in the concept of priesthood of life. Throughout our critical analysis, we will pay particular attention to the underlying assumptions and implications of this rich and dynamic theology.

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<sup>3</sup> Second Asian Laity Meeting, art. 3.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Second Asian Laity Meeting, art. 3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 115. By promoting Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities as a way to deal with the dichotomy between faith and daily life, the FABC is no doubt concerned with a problem characterised by *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 43) as “one of the gravest errors of our time.”

<sup>5</sup> Second Asian Laity Meeting, art. 3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick J. Parella, “The Laity in the Church,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 35 (1980) 269.

<sup>7</sup> We coined this term to highlight and condense the FABC’s thought on the vocation of lay people.

## 5.2 Vatican II and the FABC's Theology of the Laity

In Chapter 3 we have explored the contextual methodologies of the theology of the FABC, and highlighted its pastoral and missionary focus. Consistent with this contextual orientation, the Asian bishops have endeavoured to remain faithful to the Gospel, the tradition, and the universal magisterium, especially the vision of Vatican II, and at the same time, have maintained creativity in adapting these teachings to the concrete realities of Asia. Indeed, many of their statements are based on those of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>8</sup> At the Fourth Plenary Assembly they emphasise the need to make lay apostolate world-oriented or Kingdom-oriented because of the Asian situation and the emphasis of Vatican II.<sup>9</sup> In other statements on the role of the laity they often use phrases such as “the vision of Vatican II” when they wish to conscientise all the faithful, especially the laity, about “the new vision of Vatican II” with respect to their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world,<sup>10</sup> or to identify the needs and challenges facing the community to realise “the Vatican II vision of Church.”<sup>11</sup> They acknowledge the gap between Vatican II’s “vision of the Church as the people of God,” and the actual situation in the Church, which is due to the passivity of the laity or an unwillingness on the part of the clergy to share responsibility.<sup>12</sup> They encourage the building of a co-responsible Church according to “the vision of Vatican II.”<sup>13</sup> They also emphasise the need for the entire community to update their vision of the Church, and learn new methods and skills to enable them to work together in realising “the vision of Vatican II,”<sup>14</sup> or just to highlight efforts made in creating an atmosphere conducive to the realisation of “the vision of Vatican II.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> OEIA and OE, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 171.

<sup>9</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193-4.

<sup>10</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.7.2.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194.

<sup>11</sup> BILA V, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> BILA I, art. 2-3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 235.

<sup>13</sup> BILA II, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 242.

<sup>14</sup> BILA I, arts. 2-4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 235-6.

<sup>15</sup> BILA II, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 239.

Like Vatican II,<sup>16</sup> the Asian bishops do not provide a rigid definition of the laity, but a typological description by stressing both the generic element and the *differentia specifica*. For the Asian bishops, the generic element is the baptismal priesthood of life of the laity and their participation in the threefold mission of Christ. The specific element is the secular character of lay people who are Christians in the world of Asia. Following the Second Vatican Council's Degree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which states that "the laity, carrying out this mission of the Church, exercise their apostolate...in the world as well as in the Church, in the temporal order as well as in the spiritual,"<sup>17</sup> the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly focus on both the *ad intra* and *ad extra* aspects of the vocation and mission of lay people in the Church and in the world. They also emphasise the common priesthood and the *tria munera* of all Christians, the two overarching frameworks dynamically employed by *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.<sup>18</sup> Also like Vatican II, the FABC's theology of the laity is based on a common matrix which encompasses several tenets such as the common baptismal priesthood of all Christians, their participation in the triple function of Christ, the charisms of lay ministries, and, to a certain extent, the underlying image of the Church as communion. The indebtedness of the FABC to the teachings of Vatican II is summarised and depicted in Figure 1, which shows the organising framework of the FABC's theology of the laity against the background of the Vatican II documents that deal in a substantial way with lay people, in particular *Lumen Gentium* and

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Gaillardetz notes that Vatican II "was hardly offering an ontological definition of the laity but merely a typological one, that is, a practical definition that captures the 'typical' situation of the vast majority of the laity" ("The Theology Underlying Lay Ecclesial Ministry," *Origins* 36:9 [20 July 2006] 140). See also Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974) 312-5; Ferdinand Klostermann, "The Laity," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Burns Oates, 1968) 237.

<sup>17</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas R. Potvin contends that Vatican II uses the *theologoumenon* of *tria munera* to explain the functions of Christ, Christians, the ordained, and the Church, i.e., in Christology, anthropological theology, theology of ordained ministry, and ecclesiology. See "Le baptême comme enracinement dans la participation à la triple fonction du Christ," in *Le laïcat: Les limites d'un système. Actes du Congrès Canadien de Théologie* (Montréal: Fides, 1986) 146-7. For Herwi Rikhof, when the doctrine of Christ's threefold functions was used to explicate the term ministry in ecclesiology, the *tria munera* model "ousted the traditional division of the functions of the Church into two parts, the power of jurisdiction and the power of order" ("The Ecclesiologies of *Lumen Gentium*, the *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamental* and the Draft Code," *Concilium* 4 [1995] 61).

*Apostolicam Actuositatem*. The *ad extra* aspect of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* can be further expanded by juxtaposing two other conciliar documents, viz. *Ad Gentes*, the Degree on the Church's Missionary Activity, which underscores the prophetic ministry of the people of God, and *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which highlights their pastoral function.

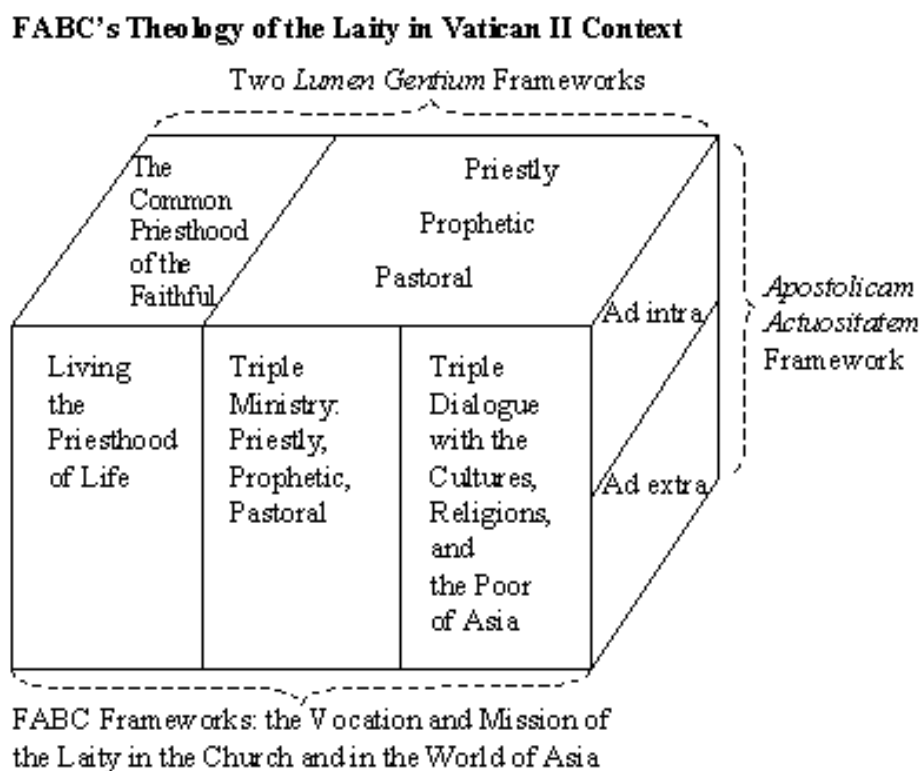


Figure 1

### 5.3 Contents of the FABC's Theology of the Laity

This section reviews the contents of the FABC's theology of the laity by examining the Asian bishops' view on the identity, vocation, mission, and spirituality of lay people, and concludes with an assessment of its development from 1970 to 2001.

#### 5.3.1 On the Identity of Lay People

In the documents of the FABC, the identity of the laity is based on two characteristics: the common baptismal priesthood of life and the secularity of lay people. First, the common priesthood, or to use the FABC's preferred term, the priesthood of life, is the

basis for the identity, dignity, equality, vocation, mission, and spirituality of all Christians. It belongs to the whole people God and has its origins in Christ himself.<sup>19</sup> Christians live this priesthood of life by participating in “all the mysteries of redemption, viz., suffering, death and resurrection.”<sup>20</sup> This concept implies the interdependency of all vocations in the Church because it is shared by all Christians including the clergy who have the obligation to live this “common priesthood of all before enacting the sacrifice of the Eucharist sacramentally.”<sup>21</sup> Through baptism and confirmation believers become Christ’s disciples and members of his Church, and are incorporated into Christ and the Eucharist.<sup>22</sup> Here, the FABC seems to expand the common basis of the identity of lay people and all Christians on the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. This description is linked to the concept of *laos*: the lay person is one who is a member of the *laos*, the people of God, in point of fact one who has been baptised and exercises the priesthood of life which belongs to all Christians.<sup>23</sup> For the FABC, “the ministerial priesthood has meaning and fullness only in relation to the common priesthood.”<sup>24</sup> Expressed in philosophical terms, one can argue that the priesthood of life is the end and the ministerial

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<sup>19</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>20</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192. Here the FABC seems to draw on Yves Congar’s thought on the relation between priesthood and sacrifice. For Congar, who rejects “the popular notion of sacrifice as ‘that which costs’,” sacrifice is “that which comes from the whole of what we are and have, and totality of our being, our activity and what we possess.... What a Christian does as a Christian is an act of Christ.... For every one of us ... there is an essentially sacrificial life.... It is in this sacrificial sense that the laity partake of Christ’s priesthood, by offering the whole of their lives, as Christ offered his.” See A.N. Williams, “Congar’s Theology of the Laity,” in *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, edited by Gabriel Flynn (Louvain: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005) 150-1.

<sup>21</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192. This statement reveals an important strain in the FABC’s theology of the laity, which espouses a more nuanced view of the traditionally sharp distinction between the ordained and the laity.

<sup>22</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 196; BILA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>23</sup> In this passage, the FABC seems to take heed of Yves Congar’s advice that “today it is the case, rather, that the clergy need to be defined in relation to the laity, who are quite simply members of the people of God animated by the Spirit.... The laity are primarily the baptized. Christians—clergy and lay—are a people of those who have been baptized” (*Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, edited by Bernard Lauret [Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1988] 65-6).

<sup>24</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192. David Coffey suggests a new term, “the priesthood of the Church,” to indicate a category that consists in the integration of the ordained and the common priesthood, both of which have a Christological reference and an ecclesiological nature. For Coffey, “only this insight enables one to reach a clear understanding of the mutual relationship” (“The Common and the Ordained Priesthood,” *Theological Studies* 58 [1997] 225).

priesthood is the means.<sup>25</sup> Also, unlike *Lumen Gentium*, which seems to favour a theology of the laity that seeks to contrast the identity of the lay people with that of the clergy, the concept of priesthood of life has enabled the FABC to adopt a positive vision of the laity, aiming to explore the common matrix for all Christians including the laity and the clergy.<sup>26</sup> This concept of priesthood of life has three possible theological characteristics. First, it encompasses the incarnational aspect of life realities and the redemptive dimension of life witness.<sup>27</sup> Second, it links the sacramental, *ad intra* participation of lay people in the Church with their daily, *ad extra* engagement in the world. Third, to a certain extent, it encompasses and harmonises the two schemata of the triple office and the common priesthood of the faithful adopted by *Lumen Gentium*, because, according to the FABC, the royal function, understood as the participation of the laity in the building up of the Kingdom of God, is linked to the priesthood of life,<sup>28</sup> and connected with the prophetic function,<sup>29</sup> which “must be a witness and a service of the whole community

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<sup>25</sup> We owe this observation to Phan Đình Cho [Peter C. Phan’s name in Vietnamese] who wrote that “in philosophical terms, the baptismal priesthood is the end, and the ministerial priesthood is the means. The latter is an instrument to serve the former” (“The Laity in the Early Church: Building Blocks for a Theology of the Laity,” *Triết Đạo: Journal of Vietnamese Philosophy and Religion* 4:2 [2002] 51). See also no. 1547 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), which states that “the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is the *means* by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church” (italics in the original). In a similar vein, D. Le Tourneau states that “le service du ministère sacerdotal est un service de quelque chose, donc de quelque chose de préexistant: la *conditio fidelis*. Nous pouvons dire alors que le sacerdoce commun est conceptuellement antérieure au sacerdoce ministériel, en prenant bien garde à ne pas parler de priorité chronologique, ce qui n’aurait pas de sens” (“Le sacerdoce commun et son incidence sur les obligations et les droits des fidèles en general et des laïcs en particulier,” *Revue de droit canonique* 39 [1989] 159).

<sup>26</sup> For an excellent treatment of a similar theme see the section entitled “A Positive Vision, Not One of Contrast, To Define the Laity” in Giovanni Magnani, “Does the So-called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status?” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 1, edited by René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 597-601, 621, and 624.

<sup>27</sup> It is of note that Yves Congar already speaks about the “priesthood of parents,” and Donald J. Goergen remarks that “partnering and parenting are a dimension of the priesthood of the laity.” See respectively, *Lay People in the Church*, revised edition with additions by the author, translated by Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) 192-3; “Priest, Prophet, King: The Ministry of Jesus Christ,” in *The Theology of Priesthood*, edited by Donald J. Goergen and Ann Garrido (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 203.

<sup>28</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193. Ormond Rush contends that “contemporary ecclesiology needs to address the unresolved tension that remains within *Lumen Gentium* between the rubric of the common priesthood as primary and the threefold *munus* as the overarching framework” (“The Offices of Christ, *Lumen Gentium* and the People’s Sense of the Faith,” *Pacifica* 16:2 [2003] 138-9).

<sup>29</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

to the saving truth of Christ and his Church. This *sensus fidelium*, or faith instinct, of the whole people of God is a gift of the Spirit to all as a body.”<sup>30</sup>

Secularity is the second characteristic of the identity of lay people, who are called to live their Christian discipleship and share in Christ’s mission according to their lay state in the Church.<sup>31</sup> Their duty is to infuse Gospel values into the various dimensions of their life—familial, social, professional, and political.<sup>32</sup> This secularity is emphasised in the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly, which discuss the ministries that must be undertaken by lay people to meet the challenges of Asia such as politics, the youth, Asian women, the family, education, mass media, the world of work, social responsibilities in business, and health services. For the Asian bishops, the primary sphere of service for lay people is the world.<sup>33</sup> As Asian Christians their ministry is to live out their double heritage of faith and country as individuals and as a community.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes the FABC emphasises the cultural identity of lay people before their religious allegiance by referring to them as “Asian citizens and Christians.”<sup>35</sup> This picture of the laity, whose identity is rooted in their dynamic

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<sup>30</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193. Michael J. Himes notes that for John Henry Newman, “one could think about the sense of the faithful in five ways: a testimony to the fact of apostolic dogma; as a sort of instinct of *phronema*, a Greek term which might best translate as ‘fundamental intentionality’, deep in the life of the Church; as an action of the Holy Spirit; as an answer to the Church’s constant prayer; and as a ‘jealousy of error’, by which he meant a sensitivity to whether something fits or clashes with the lived experience of the community.” See “What Can We Learn from Vatican II?” in *The Catholic Church in the Twenty-First Century: Finding Hope for its Future in the Wisdom of its Past*, edited by Michael J. Himes (Liguori, Miss.: Liguori, 2004) 72. According to Avery Dulles, Newman “adduced five cases in which the sense of the faithful had played a significant role in the preservation or development of Catholic doctrine” such as “the confession of Mary as Mother of God (*theotokos*) in the fifth century;...the definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.” See “*Sensus Fidelium*,” *America* (1 November 1986) 241.

<sup>31</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 197.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.8.8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 197.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>34</sup> OEIA and OE, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 31, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 170.

<sup>35</sup> OL, “The Commitment of the Laity in the Church’s Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings: Final Report on the First Asian Laity Meeting,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 119, 125; [FABC], “Final Statement of the First Asian Laity Meeting,” in *The First Asian Laity Meeting: 4-9 September 1994, Korea*, edited by Pontifical Council for the Laity, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Laity, Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea ([Seoul]: Pontifical Council for the Laity, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Laity, Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea, 1994) 255, 253.

relationship with the Church and the societies of Asia, has influenced much of the FABC's thought on lay people's vocation, mission, and ministries. It shows that for the FABC, the dual calling of faith and citizenship is at the heart of what it means to be a lay Catholic in Asia.

In sum, the FABC's understanding of the secular character of the Asian laity is theological, ecclesial, and sociological. First, from the theological perspective, the FABC uses the secularity of lay people as a *locus theologicus*, a necessary element, to describe the identity of the Asian laity and their vocation, mission and ministries. In this sense, the relationship of Asian Christians to the world gives their vocation its uniqueness. Secularity is what qualifies their life and mission in the Church and in the world. Secondly, in an ecclesial sense, the entire Asian Church, not just the laity, is in the world, and has a secular mission with the laity having a particular secularity and mission within this ecclesial secularity. Thirdly, from the sociological or phenomenological point of view, the world is the place where lay people live out their vocation and priesthood of life by participating in secular affairs in the various dimensions of their life.

### **5.3.2 On the Vocation and Mission of Lay People**

In the FABC documents, the interrelated concepts of vocation and mission of lay people have a double dimension: contextual and relational. First, vocation and mission are understood as a contextualised communion and a contextualised mission, which express both the contextual and communitarian nature of their calling and activity. Lay people and the entire Christian community are called to a communion with Jesus the Liberator, a communion of committed disciples working for the liberation of Asia, which is rooted in the realities of Asia and in solidarity with the peoples of Asia. They are called to live the Christian priesthood of life, a life committed to Jesus, in the dynamism of communion with the whole people of God, and in a living dialogue and solidarity with the world, especially the poor. It is precisely when they are engaged in temporal affairs that they are engaging in the mission of the Church. For the FABC, their priesthood of life mandates a dialogue of life.



Secondly, for the FABC, underlying the articulation of the vocation and mission of lay people is their relationship with Christ and their role *vis-à-vis* the Church, the clergy and the world.<sup>36</sup> The goal and orientation of lay ministries is to transform the world and build up of the kingdom of God in the footsteps of Christ the Liberator. In the FABC's documents there is a recurrent usage of the terms kingdom of God, "transformation," "transforming," or their cognates.<sup>37</sup> Mission is the purpose of ministries,<sup>38</sup> and evangelisation is the highest priority of mission.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, lay people must assume responsibility for the tasks of evangelisation.<sup>40</sup> While the evangelising mission encompasses many aspects such as witnessing to Christ and the values of the Kingdom, cooperating with people who strive for justice and peace, inculturation, dialogue, and sharing with other Christians and non-Christians,<sup>41</sup> it is essentially the proclamation of Christ by words, works, and especially life.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, proclamation is the centre and primary element of evangelisation,<sup>43</sup> and the ultimate goal of evangelisation is to build up the kingdom of God by a triple dialogue with the religions, cultures and the poor of Asia.<sup>44</sup>

The FABC often uses the terms mission and apostolate interchangeably,<sup>45</sup> especially in relation to the triple mission of Christ.<sup>46</sup> But, unlike the terms evangelisation and

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<sup>36</sup> BILA III, arts. 1-2, 6-7, 13.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 243-5; FABC IV, arts. 4.7.1, 4.3.1, 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194, 192-3.

<sup>37</sup> FABC IV, arts. 3.0.2-3.9.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179-190.

<sup>38</sup> APMC, art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 16-8, 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 70-2.

<sup>40</sup> FABC I, arts. 25, 36, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 16, 7.

<sup>41</sup> BIMA IV, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292; BILA III, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>42</sup> FABC I, art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 16; ICM, "Workshop I: Towards a Theology of Mission for Asia Today," *FAPA Vol. 1*, 135.

<sup>43</sup> BIMA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104; BIMA IV, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

<sup>44</sup> BIMA IV, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Zauner notes that after Vatican II, the substance of the terms "apostolate," "mission," and "sending" have changed: there is little discourse on "apostolate" as a theological idea, and the concept of "mission" has been expanded so much that all countries are now considered to be mission lands, and as a result, the urgency and tension of the latter term is weakened. See "Laien und Priester – eine Kirche," *Theologische Praktische Quartalschrift* 135:3 (1987) 209-10.

mission, which have detailed entries in the indexes of the official collection of the FABC documents, the word apostolate appears as an entry only in the index of the first volume. When they do mention the term lay apostolate, the Asian bishops tend to stress its *ad mundum* dimension, the active mission of the Church in the world, or to emphasise the imperative of triple dialogue, sometimes in conjunction with the term ministries.<sup>47</sup> They also broaden the meaning of ecclesial ministry to include “a pluriformity of ministries” for both the ordained and lay people, a concept which is more biblical and need-oriented.<sup>48</sup> For them, all ministries are modelled on the mission of Jesus the Liberator and based on charisms, but only charisms and services that meet the specific needs of the community will mature into lay ministries, which are recognised and performed with “stability, continuity and responsibility.”<sup>49</sup> This charismatic view also underlines the contextual and relational character of the FABC’s theology of lay people by stressing that charism is an integral dimension of every ministry, and ministry serves the community. Hence, lay ministries are essential to the Church, and grounded in the joint missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Figure 2 provides a summary and explanation of the terms associated with the FABC’s understanding of the concept of mission in a schematic form. It highlights that, in the contextual theology of the FABC, *diakonia* (services and ministries), *koinonia* (communion with Jesus and communion of liberation), and *kerygma* (proclamation) are constitutive of the vocation and mission of lay people, which is in the service of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>46</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.3.1, 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192-3; BILA III, arts. 1-2, 6-7, 13.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 243-5. It is of note that for Lucien Legrand, the biblical word that corresponds to the term “mission” is the Greek word “‘apostolê’, tâche ou fonction apostolique,” and it is used only four times in the New Testament (Acts 1:25, Rm 1:5, 1 Cor 9:2, and Ga 2:8). See “Vocation à la mission dans le nouveau testament,” *Spiritus* 113 (1988) 340.

<sup>47</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194; BILA II, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 241; BILA III, arts. 10-1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>48</sup> BILA II, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 241; APMC, art. 53, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 78.

<sup>49</sup> APMC, arts. 32, 55, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 74, 78; BILA II, art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 241.

### Taxonomy of the FABC's Mission-related Concepts

Kingdom of God	As goal of evangelisation
Evangelisation	As the highest priority of mission
Mission/ Apostolate	As purpose of ministries
	As <i>ad intra</i> and <i>ad extra</i> ministries
	As living the priesthood of life
	As triple ministry: priestly, prophetic, pastoral
	As triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia
Ministries	As stable, broad-based, recognised, and authenticated services
Services	As spontaneous and occasional ways of sharing in the Church's ministry

Figure 2

### 5.3.3 On Lay Spirituality

In the FABC's theology of the laity, lay spirituality is also contextual and relational. First, it is "a spirituality of discipleship"<sup>50</sup> and "a spirituality of daily life,"<sup>51</sup> common to all Christians and based on the priesthood of life, because Christian disciples exercise the priestly function in their everyday life.<sup>52</sup> It is decisively informed by a positive, contextualised engagement by lay people with the world for the purpose of building up the kingdom of God in the existential situation of family life, work, and civic responsibilities. For the Asian bishops, a deep spirituality and prayer-life will

<sup>50</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.8.7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 196-7. Peter C. Phan provides a helpful remark that "Christian spirituality, whatever its form or orientation, is in essence a following (*sequela*) or imitation (*imitatio*) or discipleship of Jesus" ("Christian Social Spirituality: A Global Perspective," in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, edited by Philomena Cullen, Bernard House and Gerard Mannion [London: T&T Clark, 2007] 25). Phan's view echoes what Yves Congar wrote earlier: "Cette vie de service est voulue par le christianisme dans lequel la qualité de disciple et celle de serviteur coïncident: car le disciple n'écoute pas seulement son maître, il l'imité et partage sa vie." See "Laïc et Laïcat," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976) col. 105.

<sup>51</sup> BILA II, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 240.

<sup>52</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

have an evangelising and witnessing value. In Asia, they observe, Christians do not impress followers of other religions as people of prayers or contemplative communities.<sup>53</sup> They further note that Asian religions emphasise a deeper awareness of God and self in recollection, silence, and prayer, flowering in openness to others, and in compassion, non-violence and generosity.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, through a sustained and reflective dialogue with believers of other religions, Christians may also hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, expressed in a marvellous variety of ways.<sup>55</sup>

Secondly, the FABC's theology of lay spirituality points to a new way of being Church, giving priority to *being* before *doing*, describing more in terms of what the Church and lay people *are* rather than what they *do*. It is Trinitarian, sacramental, and prayerful with the Eucharist as its font and summit. Most importantly, it links faith and life, ministry and spirituality,<sup>56</sup> stressing that salvation is worked out in and through relationships at home, at work, and in the marketplace.<sup>57</sup> As such, it is also a spirituality of harmony, a spirituality that emphasises "simplicity, humble presence and service."<sup>58</sup>

#### 5.3.4 On the Development of the FABC's Theology of the Laity

The survey in Chapter 4 of the FABC's theology of the laity from 1970 to 2001 has pointed out some themes that continue and some notable developments. Throughout these years, it is possible to see in the FABC's thought on the laity a coherent and consistent pattern. There is no radical departure in their theological and pastoral

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<sup>53</sup> FABC II, art. 28, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 35, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 35.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> For Keith J. Egan "ministry and spirituality are not two distinct areas of the Christian life. One depends on and affects the other. Spirituality shapes ministry and ministry shapes spirituality" ("The Call of the Laity to a Spirituality of Discipleship," *The Jurist* 47 [1987] 83).

<sup>57</sup> Without explicitly mentioning the term, the FABC seems to locate the holiness of lay people in their insertion in the world, a point that Peter C. Phan articulated in an article published a quarter of century ago: "Any authentic lay spirituality must reckon with the principle that holiness for the lay person must be achieved *in* and *through* the world and its values, not in the flight of them" ("Possibility of a Lay Spirituality: a Re-examination of some Theological Presuppositions," *Communio* 10:4 [1983] 383).

<sup>58</sup> FABC V, art. 9.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 289.

journey, but from 1986 the Asian bishops have further developed and clarified their understanding of the role of the laity in response to the challenges of Asian societies. In general, the role of lay people has been more contextualised and differentiated based on the specific needs of different regions of Asia. Their statements show a deeper concern to create of lay people, especially women, youth and children, an active force that would be empowered to work for the kingdom of God in the Church and in the world of Asia. For this task, lay people will need to be educated and trained. Therefore, the Church has a definite obligation to support the formation of lay people and this education must be suited to the lay life as such. Indeed, the Asian bishops' concern for the formation of the laity and the cooperation between all members of the community to face the changing context of Asia has been one of the most recurrent themes in the FABC documents. Lay people are called to become committed disciples of Christ, to learn the social doctrines of the Church, and to dialogue with peoples of different cultures and religions, especially the poor. Despite the changes in the articulation of the role of lay people, in response to the changing Asian context, the FABC's theology of the laity has remained contextualised and relational, firmly anchored in the teachings of Vatican II and flexibly attuned to the realities of Asia. Its structures will be examined in the following section.

#### **5.4 Structures of the FABC's Theology of the Laity**

Under the rubric of structures we will review the organising framework of the final statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Asian bishops, the epistemological perspective, and the hermeneutical approach of their theology of lay people.

##### **5.4.1 The Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC**

The Fourth Plenary Assembly was convened after the FABC had discussed the theme of evangelisation in the world of Asia (FABC I, 1974), the importance of prayer and interiority in the context of Asian realities (FABC II, 1978), and the imperative of responding to the call of Jesus together as a community of faith (FABC III, 1982). Building on the groundwork laid by these three plenary assemblies the participants of the Fourth Plenary Assembly reflected on the theme of vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and the world of Asia. Consistent with their contextual “see, judge,

act” approach, the Asian bishops’ treatment of this subject proceeds from an analysis of the signs of the times, through a collective discernment of the will of God, and finally, to a discussion of practical concerns. After reviewing the challenges facing the Church in Asia, and discussing the theological issues of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility, the Asian bishops examine the pastoral issues such as lay apostolate, clergy-laity relationship, formation *of* and *for* the laity, and lay spirituality. The organising structure of the Fourth Plenary Assembly statement shows that the FABC’s theology of the laity is markedly contextual and relational. It uses the Asian context as theological resources, explores the theological meaning of communion, mission, and ecclesial structure, and finally, addresses pastoral concerns relating to clergy-laity relationship, formation, and spirituality. This theology is influenced by the Asian bishops’ epistemological and hermeneutical views on the identity and role of the laity.

#### 5.4.2 Epistemological Perspective

Unlike much of Western theology, which favours a dichotomy between the thinking subject and the object that needs to be analysed and dominated, the Asian bishops have adopted a different epistemology which approaches the reality in its entirety, and in an organic, non-dualistic way, focusing on the inter-relationship of the parts to the whole.<sup>59</sup> For them, Asian religious cultures have a holistic view of reality, seeing human beings, society, and the whole universe as intimately related and interdependent.<sup>60</sup> Adopting this *Weltanschauung*, the FABC stresses the contextualised communion of the entire People of God, and considers both lay people and the clergy as a constitutive part of the whole body of Christ. Unlike *Lumen Gentium*, which makes an ontological distinction between the common priesthood of

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<sup>59</sup> OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” art. 5.1.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 408; TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 3.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 276-7.

<sup>60</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.1.10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 181; TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 4.3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 278-9. Michael Amaladoss notes that while “Euro-American cultures have a dualistic view of reality,” “the Indian *advaita* (non-duality) and the Chinese *tao* (one) deny such a dichotomy. Reality is inter-dependent. It is inter-being. There is a fundamental unity reality. Being is holistic, not dichotomous” (“Contextual Theology and Integration,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 40:3 [2003] 270).

the faithful and the ministerial priesthood,<sup>61</sup> the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly merely hint at the difference between laity and clergy by referring to the sacramental faculty of the clergy to celebrate the Eucharist, the source and summit of Christian life.<sup>62</sup>

This worldview also underlies much of the Asian bishops' theology of the laity, which seeks to highlight the common matrix of all Christians, laity, religious, and clergy rather than following a contrasting approach.<sup>63</sup> This common matrix is expressed in several main features of their theology. First, it retrieves the pneumatological meaning of charisms as the basis for all Christian services, ministries, and offices. In their view, all Christians are charismatic by vocation and through the sacrament of baptism.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, it uses the model of the Church as a community of faith to emphasise the communitarian vocation of all Christians, not just clergy and religious. Thirdly, it stresses that all Asian Christians are called to be a communion of disciples working for the liberation of Asia, and all share in the common priesthood of life which originates from Christ, though only the clergy can enact the sacrament of the Eucharist. The two interrelated concepts of priesthood of life and contextualised communion are foundational to their view on the identity and role of the laity. This view is encompassed by their overall vision of a new way of being Church which was articulated at the Third and the Fifth Plenary Assemblies.<sup>65</sup> For the Asian bishops, the

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<sup>61</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (no. 10) teaches that the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood "differ essentially and not only in degree." Phan Đình Cho [Peter C. Phan's name in Vietnamese] reminds us that "the difference in 'essence' and in 'degree' does not imply that the ministerial priesthood is superior to the common priesthood" ("The Laity in the Early Church: Building Blocks for a Theology of the Laity," *Triết Đạo: Journal of Vietnamese Philosophy and Religion* 4:2 [2002] 51).

<sup>62</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>63</sup> The FABC's theology of the laity also seems to move beyond the neat distinctions highlighted by Edward Hahnenberg who observes that "for almost 40 years" theological writing on the topics of ordained and lay ministry "could almost be divided into two separate conversations. One conversation revolves around the theology of priesthood. It is heavily Christological and ontological, emphasizing the priest's ability through ordination to act 'in the person of Christ' and represent Christ to the community.... Another conversation revolves around the theology of lay ministry. It is heavily pneumatological and functional, emphasizing the charisms of the Spirit flowing out of baptism and toward an individual's ministry" ("Ordained and Lay Ministry: Restarting the Conversation," *Origins* 35:6 [23 June 2005] 94).

<sup>64</sup> APMC, arts. 31-37; *FAPA Vol. 1*, 74-5.

<sup>65</sup> FABC V, art. 8.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287; FABC III, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 49-65.

Church in Asia will have to be a communion of communities, a participatory Church, a communion of small Christian communities where lay people, religious, and clergy accept each other as brothers and sisters, and a community that witnesses to Jesus Christ in a dialogue of life, and serves as a leaven of transformation and a prophetic sign to the eschatological Kingdom of God.<sup>66</sup> Mission, for the FABC, is more than deeds, and it involves the very being of the Church as a contextualised community of faith in Asia.<sup>67</sup>

### 5.4.3 Hermeneutical Approach

The FABC's theology of the laity also espouses a hermeneutical approach that seeks to read the "signs of the times" by using simultaneously Vatican II teachings as sources and Asian realities as resources. Applying the "see, judge, act" methodology it describes the laity as Asian Christians and articulates their role as agents of the dialogue of life with the religions, the cultures, and the poor of Asia. In addition to the emphasis on the prophetic-critical dimension to theology and the liberation of the poor and oppressed, favoured by Latin American theologians, and in line with the orientation of African theologies which underline "the inculturation of Christian faith in villages of Africa,"<sup>68</sup> the FABC is cognisant of the existence of a variety of cultures and religions in Asia, and hence, advocates the need for inculturation and interreligious dialogue in addition to the preferential, but not exclusive, option for the poor.

Like *Lumen Gentium*, which discusses the question of the laity from both the ontological and functional points of view,<sup>69</sup> the FABC's treatment of the role of lay people also proceeds from these perspectives, with a more pronounced emphasis on

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<sup>66</sup> FABC V, art. 8.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287-8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 6.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 283.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Schineller, "Inculturation as the Pilgrimage to Catholicity," *Concilium* 204 (August 1989) 98.

<sup>69</sup> Yves Congar observes that "in the dogmatic *Constitution on the Church* the Council avoided treating laymen [*sic*] only from the viewpoint of their apostolate. It fully satisfied the general desire of having a broad exposition of the ontology and dignity of the Christian existence." See "The Laity," in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966) 243.



the functional dimension. This functional bias has two advantages. First, it enables them to focus more on the mission and ministries of lay people rather than concentrating on the thorny issue of defining the ontological identity of the laity, a subject considered difficult by Yves Congar,<sup>70</sup> and to place more emphasis on the imperative of communion, co-responsibility, and collaboration of all Asian Christians in giving their faith-response to the massive challenges facing the Churches in Asia. An ontological view of the subject would tend to focus more on the distinction and difference between the ordained and the non-ordained to safeguard the ontological character of ordination, and hence could be seen as perpetuating the laity and clergy divide, and potentially alienating lay people.<sup>71</sup> The functional emphasis also allows the FABC to concentrate on the realities of Asia, and articulate a specific role of the laity that is more suitable in the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*. This approach is consistent with the contextual orientation of the theology of the bishops of Asia, who did not set out to develop a systematic theology, but have reflected on the lay experience in the Asian milieu, and issued pastoral statements to guide Asian Catholics in their Christian life and evangelising journey. The interaction between this pastoral and missionary theology and other postconciliar theological interpretations of the laity question will be discussed in the next section.

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<sup>70</sup> According to Yves Congar “it is very difficult to define the laity positively, perhaps even impossible,” and “the Council did not wish to commit itself to a definition of the layman [*sic*].” See “The Laity,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966) 241. In an article first published in 1948, Congar understands the “*faithful*” as “those who live normal lives in our own time and culture, and not just people living in a fixed, closed agricultural economy as did our ancestors at the time that our liturgical forms were being created.” See “‘Real’ Liturgy, ‘Real’ Preaching,” *Worship* 82:4 (July 2008) 315. For Peter Neuner, the question of “what is a lay person?” has no correct answer because the question itself is wrong, and he goes on to assert that if we have a correct theology of the people of God we do not need a separate theology of the laity (“Wenn wir eine rechte Theologie des Volkes Gottes haben, so also die These, brauchen wir keine eigene Theologie des Laien”). See “Aspekte einer Theologie des Laien,” *Una Sancta* 43 (1988) 322-3. Adopting a different perspective, Susan K. Wood observes that “with the appropriation and exercise of a variety of ministries formerly associated with ordination by the non-ordained, it is becoming increasingly clear that ordained ministry needs to be defined in terms of identity rather than function” (“Priestly Identity: Sacrament of the Ecclesial Community,” *Worship* 69:2 [March 1995] 111).

<sup>71</sup> It is instructive to recall a quotation that Peter Neuner took from P.M. Zulehner’s *Das Gottesgerücht* (Düsseldorf, 1987, p. 74): “Aus der ‘Ordination’ der einen darf nicht eine ‘Subordination’ der anderen werden” (“Was ist ein Laie?” *Stimmen der Zeit* 210 [1992] 518); see also “Aspekte einer Theologie des Laien,” *Una Sancta* 43 (1988) 324.

## 5.5 The FABC's Theology of the Laity and Other Postconciliar Theologies of the Laity

Studying the FABC's theology of laity, one is to be struck by the close parallels between its themes and other postconciliar interpretations of lay experience, in particular those of Yves Congar and Latin American liberation theologies. This section briefly discusses the notable points of convergence between these theologies, and situates the FABC's theology of the laity in the framework of theological approaches to the question of lay people proposed by Leonard Doohan. At this point, our discussion is intentionally summary as a more detailed analysis of the FABC's theology of laity will be furnished in the following chapters.

### 5.5.1 The FABC and Yves Congar's Theology of the Laity

While Yves Congar's theological corpus encompasses three broad categories, namely, ecumenism, questions of fundamental theology, and ecclesiology,<sup>72</sup> four points of convergence between his theology of the laity and the teachings of the FABC are notable. First, like Congar, the FABC provides a definition of ministry based on three characteristics: essentiality, stability, and formal recognition in the context of charisms and services.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, following Congar who employs the *triplex munus*

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<sup>72</sup> Christopher O'Donnell, "Ecclesia:" *A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 102.

<sup>73</sup> The Asian bishops distinguish between charisma, services, and ministries as follows: "Charisms are enduring gifts given to Church members to be put to use in services and ministries. Endowed with them, different members render different services, thereby contributing, each in his or her own manner, to the Christian mission. All Christians are charismatic by vocation and in virtue of their baptismal consecration; but not all are engaged in the ministry of the Church in the same manner and with the same intensity. We term *services* those ways of sharing in the Church's ministeriality which are undertaken spontaneously and on occasions. These are already in their own manner an expression of the Church's service (diakonia) and indeed indispensable for the Christian presence in the world. *Ministries* apply more properly to those services which Church members undertake with a certain stability and exercise on a sufficiently broad basis, thus sharing formally in the Church's responsibility to signify the presence to men of Christ's saving action. All such ministries must be recognized by the community and authenticated by it in the person of its leader. Thus, every service and ministry of the Church supposes a charism but not every charism blossoms into a ministry." See FABC, "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church," art. 32, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 74. They further clarify that "not every charism or service needs to be recognized as ministry but only those which the life and growth of the community require to be exercised with stability, continuity and responsibility." *Ibid.*, 78. The US Bishops' National Advisory Council quoted approvingly this comprehensive and interesting definition considering it "useful for the Catholic Church in the United States to employ the distinctions made by

schema to examine the role of lay people, the Asian bishops affirm that “lay people with special charisms to exercise ministries” are called to “exercise in a public manner some aspects of the Christian’s function of priest, prophet and pastor.”<sup>74</sup> They also use the *tria munera* framework to explain in detail the priestly, prophetic, and royal functions of lay people.<sup>75</sup> Another point of convergence between Congar and the FABC is their emphasis on the common priesthood of the faithful as the background and starting point for their theology of laity. However, whereas Congar employs the term “spiritual priesthood” and considers it to be the background of his theology of lay people, the FABC prefers to call it “priesthood of life” stressing that “the priestly function belongs to the whole people of God.”<sup>76</sup> Finally, as with Congar, the Asian bishops utilise the concepts of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility as the basis for their explication of the mission of lay people. In their view, the renewal of inner ecclesial structures “consists in creating the right atmosphere of communion, collegiality and co-responsibility for an active and fuller lay initiation, participation and action.”<sup>77</sup> As a pastoral movement, Latin American liberation theologies have also called for a greater participation and involvement by the entire people of God. Their influence on the FABC’s theology of the laity will be briefly discussed in the next section.

### 5.5.2 The FABC and Latin American Liberation Theologies

Besides the theology of Yves Congar, the FABC’s theology of the laity has drawn on the main insights of Latin America liberation theologies. In its official documents, the FABC has often evoked three distinctive principles of Latin American liberation theologies, namely, an emphasis on historical liberation and human development, a preferential but not exclusive option for the poor, and a bottom-up ecclesiology

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the FABC between charisms, ministry and service.” U.S. Bishops’ National Advisory Council, “The Trust of Lay Ministry,” *Origins* 9:39 (13 March 1980) 624.

<sup>74</sup> FABC, “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” art. 54, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 78.

<sup>75</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.2-4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192-3.

<sup>76</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.2.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192. For the Asian bishops, the common priesthood of the faithful “is the real priesthood of life” having its origins in Christ himself,” and “the clergy have the obligation to live the common priesthood of all before enacting the sacrifice of the Eucharist sacramentally. Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.5.1-2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193; see also FABC III, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 49-65.

privileging the experience of basic ecclesial communities and the process of conscientisation.<sup>78</sup> First, the FABC emphasises the call for Asian Christians “to become a Church deeply committed to Jesus the Liberator,” because “such a commitment by all Christians will make the Church a communion of committed disciples – be they clergy or laity – working for the liberation of Asia.”<sup>79</sup> Secondly, the FABC highlights the preferential, but not exclusive, option for the poor,<sup>80</sup> and encourages Catholic schools to “reflect the Church’s preferential option for the poor.”<sup>81</sup> Thirdly, the FABC promotes basic Christian communities, considering them as “the most fundamental ecclesial realities” which embody “the mystery of the Church in their own right.”<sup>82</sup> The Asian bishops also feel that conscientisation is “particularly important today in educating all to justice, especially the young.”<sup>83</sup> For them, conscientisation means “to become aware of social conditions surrounding us by reflection and analysis to concrete action,”<sup>84</sup> a process that seeks “the change and transformation of unjust social structures.”<sup>85</sup> This commitment to bring about social justice and to transform the world has been identified by Leonard Doohan as one of the main theological approaches to lay experience. It is therefore instructive to provide a brief excursus into the extent to which the FABC’s theology of laity fits into Doohan’s taxonomy of theological interpretations of the laity question.

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<sup>78</sup> [Latin American Bishops], Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops: “The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council” (August 26-September 6, 1968 [Medellín, Columbia]), in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited with introductions, commentary and translations by Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990) 89-119; Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops: “Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future” (Pueblo de los Angeles, Mexico, January 27-February 13, 1979), *ibid.*, 225-58.

<sup>79</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>80</sup> BILA III, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 244.

<sup>81</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.5.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 185.

<sup>82</sup> FABC, “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” art. 40, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 76.

<sup>83</sup> BISA II, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 204.

<sup>84</sup> BISA II, art. 7, note 1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 205; see also BISA III, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 208.

<sup>85</sup> FABC I, art. 21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 15.

### 5.5.3 The FABC and Leonard Doohan's Theology of the Laity

Of the five theological interpretations of the laity question identified by Doohan in Chapter 2, the third approach, the theology of world transformation, and elements of the fourth approach, the theology of laity and ecclesial restructuring, are most readily discernible in the FABC's theology of laity. First, like the theology of world transformation, the Asian bishops emphasise the duty of all Christians to transform the world, declaring that "through work of every kind we are participating in God's own ongoing process of recreating and transforming our world."<sup>86</sup> In a categorical statement they declare that "to shut oneself totally away from the demands of the political transformation of Asia is, surely, in a sense, a denial of Christian identity."<sup>87</sup> Secondly, like the variegated features identified in Doohan's fourth theological approach, the bishops recognise the need for ecclesial restructuring based on the "principles of communion, co-responsibility and collegiality,"<sup>88</sup> emphasise the common mission of all Christians,<sup>89</sup> base their theology of laity on an emphasis on the common priesthood of life,<sup>90</sup> propose a model of the Church as a community of faith,<sup>91</sup> and promote the development of basic Christian communities.<sup>92</sup> These theological features together with the focus, context, and intended audience of the FABC's theology of the laity have to be taken into account in order to achieve a balanced assessment of its strengths and areas that may require further amplification and improvement.

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<sup>86</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.7.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 187, and 188-9.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 180.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.5.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>91</sup> FABC III, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 49-65.

<sup>92</sup> FABC, "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church," art. 46, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 77.

## 5.6 Strengths and Limitations of the FABC's Theology of the Laity

The context, contents, and structures of the FABC's theology of the laity, together with its interaction with other postconciliar interpretations of the laity, discussed in the previous sections show that it is contextual and relational in its approach and orientation. It also reveals that the Asian bishops are not interested in developing a systematic theology of the laity as their theology has always been attuned to the pastoral and missionary questions of the day. It is a contextualised, pastoral theology *par excellence*, seeking to apply the teachings of the Second Vatican Council to the context of Asia, and marrying theological reflection and social analysis. Its goal is to empower lay people to reclaim their right as full and equal members of the Church, and to be co-responsible with the clergy for the evangelising mission in the world of Asia. It advocates a common matrix, which is based on a contextualised identity of lay people flowing from a baptismal, common priesthood of life. It includes a call to a contextualised communion, a contextualised mission whose mode is dialogue, a contextualised renewal of ecclesial structure which is adaptable to the Asian realities on the basis of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility, and a contextualised spirituality of discipleship and harmony which manifests itself in a spirituality of triple dialogue. This common matrix is supported by a contextualised formation *of* and *for* the laity, aiming to help them to assume the task of building up the kingdom of God by engaging in the dialogue of life with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. Their identity and role is ultimately defined by their triple relationship with Christ, the Asian Church, and the Asian realities.

Indeed, the greatest strength of the FABC's theology of the laity is that it is contextual and relational. It seeks to adapt the "constants" of the Gospel, tradition, and Vatican II to the "context" of cultures and social changes in the Church and in the world of Asia.<sup>93</sup> It draws on lay people's existential relationship with Christ, the Church and the world as theological resources. It is Christocentric and *ad mundum*, stressing lay people's participation in the very mission of Christ and his Church, and decidedly orientated to the world. The Asian bishops consider the vocation of lay people as a

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<sup>93</sup> For an expanded discussion of these motifs in relation to Christian mission see Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, American Society of Missionary Series, no. 30 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

communion with Jesus, and link it with a communion of liberation. They show that the laity's vocation is directly connected, not only to Jesus Christ the Liberator, but also to the concrete realities of the world of Asia. Their theology of the laity focuses on exploring the common matrix of Christian vocation, which is based on the sacraments of Christian initiation, expressed primarily by the concept of baptismal, common priesthood of life, a matrix that has a permanent value, and from which different Christian vocations are born, rather than insisting on nailing down those elements that distinguish ordained ministries from lay ministries. For them, lay people are Asian Christians pure and simple.<sup>94</sup>

However, the FABC's theology of the laity has certain limitations. The first is that the individual dimension of holiness is somewhat understated. While the Asian bishops were no doubt aware of the universal call of Christians to holiness, a theme that holds a prominent place in *Lumen Gentium*,<sup>95</sup> it did not rate a mention in the statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly, their *magna carta* for the laity, or in the indexes of the three-volume collection of the official documents of the FABC. Only rarely did the Asian bishops refer explicitly to the universal call of Christians to holiness, and when they did, they discussed it in relation to the clergy and religious.<sup>96</sup> They probably decided that given the audience they were trying to address, the most appropriate point of departure for their theology of the laity was the communal response to the challenges of Asia in light of Vatican II's vision. This approach means that the essential connection of mission with the call for holiness has received less emphasis than it could in another approach to the subject. The bishops also did not discuss explicitly the doxological character of ministry and spirituality, a theological feature that emphasises that the purpose of our daily life and service must be to glorify and to worship the Triune God.

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<sup>94</sup> Pascal Thomas also emphasises the common identity of all Christians by choosing an eye-catching title for his book on the laity: *Ces chrétiens que l'on appelle laïcs* (Paris: Les Éditions Ouvrières) 1988. It is likely that this title is based on *Lumen Gentium* (no. 30), the Latin version of which reads: "Sancta Synodus, muneribus Hierarchiae declaratis, libenter animum advertit statui illorum christifidelium qui laici nuncupantur." See Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarationes*, cura et studio Secretariae Generalis Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II (Roma: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1966) 135.

<sup>95</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 39-32.

<sup>96</sup> BILA II, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. I*, 240; BILA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. I*, 244.

Another limitation of the FABC's theology of the laity is that its emphasis on the common matrix and the autonomy of lay people could blur the clergy-lay distinction, especially with regard to their respective roles in the world.<sup>97</sup> Even though the FABC clearly thinks that laity and clergy have a different role in society, the impression left by this approach can be just the opposite. Once again, this has to do with the starting point. The FABC chooses to proceed with a common matrix to show that sacramental initiation is the basis for the vocation and mission of all Asian Christians, and their mission in the world is synonymous with the mission of the whole Church. Lay people might come to a new appreciation of the empowerment and autonomy in their ministry in the world, but that could lead them to suppose that the clergy have little more to offer. Therefore, the FABC's theology of the laity could be strengthened by an investigation into "an ordering of the baptismal priesthood of all the faithful,"<sup>98</sup> expressed by an ordering of the ministries, both lay and ordained, in service of the mission of Christ.<sup>99</sup> In this framework of ordered ministries, which is already implicit in the FABC's theology of lay people, all Christians share a common baptismal identity and a common mission before they are further specified by their state in life

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<sup>97</sup> It is worth noting Kenan B. Osborne's remark that, after Vatican II, "the church is primarily the earthly *communio sanctorum*, an undivided people of God, an undivided community of *christifideles*, a casteless priesthood of all believers. At this fundamental level, terms such as lay and cleric have absolutely no meaning" (*Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* [New York: Paulist Press, 1993] 598). For Osborne, in the third millennium, "the very term *sacerdotium* will be replaced by the term *ecclesia*, 'people of God', and the very term *regnum* will be replaced by the term 'a pluralistic world'. It is no longer a question of *sacerdotium* standing over and against a *regnum*, but rather a community called church within a larger community called a pluralistic world" ("A Profile of the Baptized Catholic Christian at the Beginning of the Third Millennium," *The Catholic World* [January-February 1996] 38). Brian Staudt contends that, unlike Osborne, who sees "the authentic revelation of God in Scripture alone and development beyond Scripture as outside God's plan," J.-M.R Tillard's "examination of the patristic sources and his presupposition that the Holy Spirit played a guiding role in the early church's process of becoming the church that Christ founded leads him to conclude that a division of ministries is necessary and appropriate even within the communion of believers co-equal in dignity." See "The Lay-Cleric Distinction: Tragedy or Comedy?" *Church* 12:3 (Fall 1996) 47; see also J.-M.R Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

<sup>98</sup> Susan K. Wood, "Introduction: The Collegeville Ministry Seminar," in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) x.

<sup>99</sup> The move from the narrow categories of laity and clergy to a broader concept of "ordered ministries" was one of the main conclusions reached by ten noted theologians who gathered at a research seminar in 2002. See *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003).



and their particular ministry.<sup>100</sup> Entrance into ministries or orders then constitutes a new ecclesial relationship.<sup>101</sup> A deeper reflection on the theme of ordered ministries and the concept of communion as “rightly ordered relationships”<sup>102</sup> with Christ, the Church, and others, would better articulate the FABC’s theology of the laity and its emphasis on the vocation of lay people as a communion with Jesus and a communion of liberation, and their priestly, prophetic, and royal mission.<sup>103</sup> It would also reflect more closely the nature of the Church as both communion and mission, and preserve the unity of mission in a diversity of ministries that are grounded in a baptismal, hence Trinitarian, communion. In the Church of Jesus the Liberator, all Christians, lay and ordained, are baptised *for* and *into* communion and mission.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has evaluated the context, contents, and structures of the FABC’s theology of the laity. It also examines the interaction between this theology and other postconciliar theologies of the laity, and provides an assessment of its strengths and limitations. It argues that this theology is eminently contextual and relational, displaying the twin characteristics of fidelity and creativity, adhering to the traditions and teachings of Vatican II, and adapting to the Asian context within the overall vision of a triple dialogue with the religions, the cultures, and the poor of Asia. It is a contextual theology *par excellence*, reforming rather than revolutionary, using the conciliar teachings and the challenges of Asia as theological sources and resources, and aiming to awaken the Asian laity and challenge them to take up their specific mission and ministries in the Church and in the world.<sup>104</sup> It stresses the unity of faith

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<sup>100</sup> Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational Approach* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2003) 122-50; Susan K. Wood, “Conclusion: Convergence Points toward a Theology of Ordered Ministries,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) 260.

<sup>101</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, “The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) 48.

<sup>102</sup> Cardinal Roger Mahony, “Church of the Eucharist, a Communion for Mission,” *Origins* 33:42 (1 April 2004) 726.

<sup>103</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.1-4.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191-2.

<sup>104</sup> In *The Christian Commitment*, Karl Rahner states that “‘everything depends on the layperson’s understanding that he is, as an individual, irreplaceable, with a specifically Christian and moral task to

and life, links mission and spirituality, and emphasises the importance of both being and doing. It calls for a contextualised identity of lay people as Asian Christians, a contextualised communion, a contextualised mission, a contextualised renewal of structures, and a contextualised spirituality, supported by a contextualised program of formation *of* and *for* the laity. In this theology, the ministries of lay people are grounded in the inseparable missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and their identity and role are ultimately based on their triple relationship with Jesus, the Church, and the world of Asia.

While it has some minor limitations such as an under-emphasis on the universal call for individual holiness, an inadequate treatment of the doxological dimension of lay ministry and spirituality, and a potential blurring of lay-cleric distinction in their respective role in the world, the FABC's theology of the laity offers a view that is well attuned to the Asian context. Its contextual and relational character is summed up by the concept of priesthood of life, a rich matrix that encompasses the ontological aspect of lay people's incorporation into Christ, and the functional dimension of everyday life service and ministry based on the charisms of the Holy Spirit. In the FABC's theology of the laity, priesthood of life leads to dialogue of life. This contextual and relational approach is also evident in the FABC's theology of the Church, which is understood as both communion and mission. These motifs and other theological features of this ecclesiology provide the ecclesiological underpinnings for the FABC's theology of the laity, and they will be explored in the next chapter.

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be performed within groups not directly subject to the church's official control, a task of which he will have to give an account before the judgment seat of God'." Quoted by William O'Malley, "The Church of the Faithful," *America* (19 June 1993) 7.

## CHAPTER 6

### CHURCH AS CONTEXT FOR LAY VOCATION AND MISSION: FEATURES OF THE FABC'S ECCLESIOLOGY (1970-2001)

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the years since the Second Vatican Council, especially after the promulgation in 1972 of Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Letter *Ministeria Quaedam*,<sup>1</sup> inviting episcopal conferences to request the establishment of new ministries from the Holy See, lay apostolic activity has flourished in the Church.<sup>2</sup> National conferences of bishops have also issued numerous statements in support of lay ministries.<sup>3</sup> In Asia, the conclusions of the FABC's "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church" held in 1977 listed

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<sup>1</sup> Paul VI, "*Ministeria Quaedam*, 15 August 1972: Apostolic Letter on First Tonsure, Minor Orders and the Subdiaconate," in *Vatican II: Vol. 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1976) 427-32. Thomas P. Rausch observes that "in the years after the council, the rediscovery of the laity's participation in the mission of the Church focused particularly on the question of ministry" ("Ministry and Ministries," in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003] 57).

<sup>2</sup> According to Peter Hebblethwaite, by granting episcopal conferences the "freedom to experiment" this Apostolic Letter had led to a "ministry explosion" in the 1980s. See *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1994) 599. Zeni Fox traces this emergence of lay ministry to three factors, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, cultural trends, and the movement of the Spirit in the Church. See "The Rise of Lay Ministry in the Years since Vatican II," in *The Church in the Nineties: Its Legacy, Its Future*, edited by Pierre M. Hegy (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1993) 230-41. Fox mentions three conciliar documents in particular: the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which heralds a model of the Church in which all members are invited to participate actively, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (nos. 7, 12, 30, 31, 33) which stresses that Christ continues to distribute gifts of ministry in His Body, that is the Church, and the Degree on the Apostolate of the Laity (no. 22) which elaborates on the same themes.

<sup>3</sup> See, for examples, U.S. Bishops, "Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity, 1980, Reflections of the U.S. Bishops," *Origins* 10:24 (27 November 1980) 369, 371-3; "Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium," *Origins* 25:24 (30 November 1995) 409-15; "Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord," *Origins* 35:25 (1 December 2005) 405-27; *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions: A Report of the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on the Laity, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999); National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Gifts Unfolding: The Lay Vocation Today with Questions for Tomorrow* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1990); *One Body: Different Gifts Many Roles: Reflections on the American Catholic Laity* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1987); Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *The Sign We Give: Report from the Working Party on Collaborative Ministry* (Chelmsford, Essex: Matthew James Publishing, 1995).

more than forty types of lay ministries, and predicted that more ministries would emerge in response to the needs of particular communities.<sup>4</sup> Nine years later, at the Fourth Plenary Assembly in 1986, the Asian bishops examined the whole question of the vocation and mission of lay people in the Church and in the world of Asia.<sup>5</sup> Their theology of the laity reflected a particular ecclesiology that had been discussed in detail at the Third Plenary Assembly in 1982,<sup>6</sup> under the theme of “The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia.”<sup>7</sup> However, various aspects of this ecclesiology have been addressed, often in passing, both before and after this assembly, from the Asian bishops’ first meeting in 1970 to their plenary gathering in 2001. Our main argument is that there was both a fundamental continuity and a gradual development in the FABC’s ecclesiology during this period of time. It is worth noting that, in line with their predominantly missionary and pastoral orientation, the Asian bishops did not develop a systematic ecclesiology.<sup>8</sup> Their ecclesiological interpretations were

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<sup>4</sup> APMC, arts. 58-70, 57, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 79-81.

<sup>5</sup> FABC IV, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 177-98.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that, like its overall theology whose aim is primarily pastoral and missionary, the FABC did not intend to produce a systematic ecclesiology. For Michael A. Fahey, “as the fields of theology and ecclesiology become more and more complex, it is not surprising to see that complete treatises on ecclesiology are rarely composed by individual theologians,” and some of the leading Catholic theologians of the twentieth century—for example, “Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, even to a certain extent Yves Congar”—have not attempted a “comprehensive ecclesiology” at all. See “Church,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1, edited by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992) 15-6. Fahey added that “attempts at a comprehensive ecclesiology are typically becoming collaborative works.” *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> FABC III, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 49-65. Karl Rahner argues that ecclesiology is “to the other treatises of dogmatics what grammar, poetics, and semantics are to poetry” (*The Church after the Council* [New York: Crossroad, 1966] 70). While the Asian bishops’ view of the role of lay people (FABC IV) in the Asian Church derives, to a large extent, from their ecclesiology (FABC III), we argue that there is a two-way hermeneutical relationship between the final statements of these two plenary assemblies: FABC IV is to be understood in the light of FABC III and vice versa.

<sup>8</sup> T. Howland Sanks notes that “as theological treatises go, ecclesiology is perhaps the youngest member of the family. ‘The oldest Treatise on the Church’ is a title given to James of Viterbo’s *De regimine christiano* which appeared in 1301 or 1302.” See *Authority in the Church: A Study in Changing Paradigms* ([Missoula, Montana]: American Academy of Science, 1974) 11. In his classic study on the history of ecclesiology, Bernard P. Prusak remarks that the period 1400-1900 saw the rise of ecclesiology as a systematic discipline and two prominent proponents were Johann Adam Möhler and John Henry Newman. See *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 229-69; see also Eric Plumer, “The Development of Ecclesiology: Early Church to the Reformation,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 23. Michael J. Himes makes a more specific observation that “beginning in the nineteenth century there emerged a systematic ecclesiology, that is, an ecclesiology which considered the connections between the Church and the central doctrinal areas of the Christian faith, such as Trinity, incarnation, Holy Spirit, creation, grace, eschatology, etc.” (“The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the

generally crafted to address specific challenges facing the Churches in Asia.<sup>9</sup> However, beneath the particularities of their conceptions of the Church lie a consistency of thought expressed by theological principles and themes of enduring value. We also suggest that by defining the Church as a community of faith in Asia, an ecclesiological category reminiscent of Yves Congar's theological insights, the FABC has remained faithful to the teaching of Vatican II, and at the same time prepared to explicate the richness of the mystery of the Church in a theological category that is readily comprehended and communicable to all the faithful in Asia.

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Twentieth Century,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 45). For him, Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) “deserves to be regarded as the creator of ecclesiology as a field within systematic (or, as he would have said, scientific) theology.” Ibid., 56. According to Himes, “Möhler is significant in the history of ecclesiology for three reasons: First, his early Spirit-centered understanding of the Church, although largely forgotten in the nineteenth century, did have an influence in the twentieth century, most notably on Yves Congar. Second, his mature incarnation-centered ecclesiology was an important moment in the recovery of the image of the Mystical Body of Christ for the Church; one can see its effect on Pius XII's *Mystici corporis*. But, third and most importantly, the development of his ecclesiology in interaction with his Christology and theological anthropology gradually affected the way in which subsequent theologians understood the church.” Ibid., 58. Joseph A. Komonchak contends that “ecclesiology, as a theological discipline, is still in search of a critical scientific method and goal” (“Concepts of Communion: Past and Present,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 16:1 [February 1995] 336). To develop a synthetic, comprehensive, and critical ecclesiology, he suggests a few actions: first, “to make an inventory of all the kinds of statements that Bible and tradition, worship and mission, theology and practice require us to make about the Church”; second, “to distinguish, in order later to relate, various levels of discourse: between, for example, first-order, symbolic, imageful language and second order, critical and systematic language, between faith-statements derived from revelation (the *creditum*) and statements derived from historical and social experience (the *scitum*), and between statements about identity and statements about mission”; third, we could ask “not simply *what* is the Church, but also *where*, that is, *of whom* and *in whom* are these statements true?”; finally, “we might also realize the significance for a theology of the Church of all sorts of other statements that we have to make, statements drawn not from revelation but also from historical experience.” Ibid. 337-8. In his view, “the rise of ecclesiology to the status of a central theological discipline in the last century and a half can be read as part of the movement by which the Church has become increasingly aware of itself as a ‘process of self-constitution’, a *Selbstvollzug*.” See “The Church Universal as the Communion of Local Churches,” *Concilium* 146 (1981) 32. Komonchak further observes that “the life of the Church, its self-realization, is ... a primary datum for the historian of ecclesiology” (“The Significance of Vatican II for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 69). For him, “ecclesiology has for its object of investigation and reflection not only such images and symbols, doctrines and theories, but also the concrete ‘process of self-constitution’ by which the Church comes to be in Christian men and women.” *Foundations in Ecclesiology* ([Chestnut Hill, Mass.]: Boston College, 1995) 56; see also “Ecclesiology and Social Theory: A Methodological Essay,” *The Thomist* (April 1981) 262, 283.

<sup>9</sup> In some sense the FABC's theology of the Church can be called a “practical-prophetic ecclesiology,” to borrow Nicholas M. Healy's felicitous expression. See *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 24. Healy laments that “in general ecclesiology in our period has become highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than oriented to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that is the church actually is.” Ibid., 3.

In this chapter, the concepts of communion and mission in the world, both recurrent themes in the documents of the Asian bishops, will be used as hermeneutical keys to explicate the FABC's understanding of the nature, mission, and structures of the Church, and where appropriate, with reference to the teachings of Vatican II. The first two sections of this chapter will explore the ecclesiological foundations of the FABC's theology of the laity under two major themes: the vocation of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, and the mission of the Church in the world of Asia. In the third section, we will trace the development of this ecclesiology, highlighting its basic continuity and gradual progression. We will also discuss the FABC's increasing emphasis on the concept of the Church as communion-in-mission and other contextual themes of solidarity with the poor, Christian discipleship, and basic ecclesial communities. As a framework for analysis and exposition,<sup>10</sup> we will employ Bernard Lonergan's four functions of meaning: constitutive (dealing with the subjective aspect or identity), efficient (having to do with the practical, world-transforming aspect or mission), communicative (addressing the inter-subjective aspect or particular understanding of community), and cognitive (considering the objective aspect of faith tradition or definable content, categories that are determined "not only by experience but also by understanding and, commonly, by judgment as well").<sup>11</sup> In practice, we will endeavour to investigate the FABC's theology of the Church by addressing the following questions: What constitutes the nature and mission of the Church in Asia?<sup>12</sup> How is this conception of the Church expressed and

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<sup>10</sup> As this chapter is intentionally analytical and expository rather than critical, we will provide a detailed evaluation of the FABC's ecclesiology in Chapter 7.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 76-81; see also "Dimensions of Meaning," in *Collection: Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Duran (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1988) 232-45. This framework of meanings has been expanded deftly and allusively by Anthony J. Kelly and Francis Moloney in *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003) 55-7, 338-407. For Bernard Lonergan, the Church is not only a cognitive community that believes in a body of doctrines; it is also a constitutive and effective community: it "is constitutive inasmuch as it crystallizes the hidden inner gift of love into overt Christian fellowship. It is effective inasmuch as it directs Christian service to human society to bring about the kingdom of God." Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *ibid.*, 362. In his view, "the conjunction of both the constitutive and communicative functions of meaning yield the three key notions of community, existence, and history." *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> This question is in line with *Lumen Gentium* (no.1) which stated its purpose as to unfold the Church's "own nature and universal mission." It is also worthwhile to recall Louis J. Luzbetak's observation that "whatever the philosophical distinction between the nature of the Church and the nature of its mission may be, the two terms are closely related: what the Church *does* should flow from what the Church *is*" (*The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 12 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988) 375.

realised in the life *ad intra* and *ad extra* of the Church? And, to what extent this ecclesiology is faithful to the teaching of Vatican II?<sup>13</sup> As an aid to this assessment, we will recall Cardinal Francis E. George's astute remark that "the sea-change in ecclesiology approved by Vatican II is not a passage from 'hierarchy' to 'people'." Both of these are societal metaphors and each is needed; but the radical difference in ecclesial self-understanding is the shift from society to communion in explaining what the Church is most fundamentally. In *Lumen gentium*, Vatican II draws upon Trinitarian theology to describe the Church as a communion of persons, as is the Godhead."<sup>14</sup> To identify the FABC's main ecclesiological themes we will also rely on

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Severino Dianich, takes issue with this view and argues that "the maxim 'agere sequitur esse' no longer finds in the realm of ecclesiology calm and accepted applications if the Church has to be thought of as in tension towards the kingdom and, therefore, in essential connection with the world and history" ("The Current State of Ecclesiology," *Concilium* 146 [1981] 95). Dianich concludes that the theme of mission "seems to have shown itself not as one among several topics of ecclesiology but rather *the* area in which to pose the fundamental question concerning the nature of the Church." *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, the term "the teaching of Vatican II" is here understood to mean, in a narrow sense, the sixteen conciliar documents, namely, four Constitutions, nine Degrees, and three Declarations. For Peter C. Phan, the teaching of Vatican II should encompass not only these sixteen documents, but also other postconciliar documents such as the 1983 *New Code of Canon Law*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, etc. See "Reception of Vatican II in Asia," *FABC Papers No. 117* [Part III, Section G, no pagination], <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-117.htm> (accessed 31 October 2006). It is also worthwhile to recall Ormond Rush's observation that "the Council intended to differentiate the authority levels of each of its documents by giving them different titles, although the precise authoritative significance of each title is never explained" (*Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* [New York: Paulist Press, 2004] 33). Within the ambit of this chapter, we will not be concerned with the authority level of each of the sixteen Vatican II documents, but will bear in mind a hermeneutical principle set down by the 1985 Synod of Bishops: "it is not licit to separate the pastoral character from the doctrinal vigor of the documents." Synod of Bishops, "The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops," no. 5, *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 445.

<sup>14</sup> Francis E. George, "Response [to Avery Dulles' paper: 'The Church and the Kingdom']," in *A Church for All Peoples: Missionary Issues in a World Church*, edited by Eugene LaVerdiere (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1993) 28-9. George goes on to note that "the contrast between communion and society is not fully defined in the council documents. To understand the contrast, we can think of the distinction in Weberian sociology between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*; but neither of these sets of relations speaks of transcending, as does communion." *Ibid.*, 29. Louis Bouyer explains the difference between these concepts as follows: *Gemeinschaft* are communities or "societies that are in some sense natural, such as family, the tribe, the collectivity, formed by a small rural agglomeration"; on the other hand, *Gesellschaft* are associations, "formed or made by a kind of 'social contract.'" See Louis Bouyer, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982) 469. We will also press into service six points of emphasis in the ecclesiology of Vatican II suggested by Monika K. Hellwig: "the organic-dynamic rather than static-institutional role of the Church in human history; collegiality as constitutive of the Church; enculturation as perennial and necessary; the renewed awareness of prophetic vocation; the Church as essentially missionary, that is, as having a task not only for its own members but for the world; and a new realization of the worldly and temporal dimensions of healing and reconciliation in the calling of the Church to continue the mission of Christ in the world." See "Twenty-Five Years of a Wakening Church: Liturgy and Ecclesiology," in *The Awakening Church: 25 Years of Liturgical Renewal*, edited by Lawrence J. Madden (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 56.

some general criteria such as frequency of occurrence, new and precise expressions, and the length of discussion in the documents of the FABC, in particular, the final statements of plenary assemblies.

The title of the Third Plenary Assembly document is significant. It speaks of “a community” “of faith” “in Asia.” The emphasis, then, is placed on a particular local Church in communion with the universal Church and other local Churches,<sup>15</sup> and rooted in the concrete, existential and historical realities of the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*.<sup>16</sup> This community is united by faith,<sup>17</sup> “the first single and shared reality by which the Church exists.”<sup>18</sup> By this interpretation the FABC appears to adopt the older New Testament understanding of *ekklesia* as a local assembly—the Pauline view—rather than referring to the Church as the universal Church.<sup>19</sup> It also adheres to the patristic

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<sup>15</sup> For Patrick Granfield, “*Koinonia* brings together two essential qualities of the Church—its locality and universality—as co-aspects of one and the same reality” (“The Church Local and Universal: Realization of Communion,” *The Jurist* 49 [1989] 450).

<sup>16</sup> The historical dimension of the Asian context could have been made more explicit if the FABC had followed the lead of *Gaudium et spes* and added the term “today” to this title. The revised title thus read, “The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia *Today*,” would bring into relief the world of Asia as it has come to be through various historical developments, a world in which human beings, and hence the Church, are active agents of history, conscious of their destiny and respective role, and responsible for its future by their past, current, and future actions.

<sup>17</sup> One can argue that the FABC might indirectly refer to the role of the *sensus fidelium* in the development and reception of the doctrine of faith.

<sup>18</sup> Yves Congar, “The Conciliar Structure or Regime of the Church,” *Concilium* 167 (September 1983) 4.

<sup>19</sup> Analysing the occurrences of the term *ekklesia* in seventeen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, Raymond F. Collins concludes that *ekklesia* was used in two senses: the first reflects an older usage to connote a local assembly, “an event that which occurs in a given place and a given time”; the second, a more recent usage, refers to the universal Church. See “Did Jesus Found The Church? Which Church?” *Louvain Studies* 21:4 (1996) 357, 359, 363. Collins notes that for Paul, “the church is a gathering of people. Hence it is commonplace for writers to say that Paul uses the term *ekklesia* of the local church. This is true providing that one recalls that *ekklesia* is local because it is an event.” *Ibid.*, 359. For Hermann von Lips, the Pauline *ekklesia* can “designate the individual community as well as the church” (“New Testament Aspects of Ecclesiology,” *Theology Digest* 45:3 [Fall 1998] 222). Dionisio Borobio makes a similar remark that the New Testament uses the term *ekklesia* for both the local community and the universal Church, but more often it means the local Christian community. “Comunidad Eclesial y Ministerios,” *Phase* 123 (1981) 184. T. Howland Sanks notes that Paul uses *ekklesia* “in the first letter to the Thessalonians (1:1), the earliest extant Christian document (c. 50 C.E.).” See *Salt, Leaven, and Light: The Community Called Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 48. Sanks also observes that “Matthew’s is the only Gospel to use the word *ekklesia*, church, as self-designation. It is used three times, once of the universal church (16:18) and twice of the local church (18:17)”; see also Hans-Josef Klauck, “Eucharist and Church Community in Paul,” *Theology Digest* 35:1 (Spring 1988) 21; John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002) 27; Raymond Brown, “New Testament Background for the Concept of Local Church,” *CTSA Proceedings* 36 (1981) 2. Bernard P. Prusak remarks that “since the



notion of the Church as communion,<sup>20</sup> a fertile concept that the 1985 Synod of Bishops proposed as the underlying framework of the Church at Vatican II.<sup>21</sup> The statement itself comprises the main text, which consists of five parts,<sup>22</sup> the “Resolutions of the Assembly,”<sup>23</sup> and “the ‘Syllabus of Concerns’ of the Plenary

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two passages referring to *ekklēsia* or Church do not appear in any other Gospel, contemporary exegetical scholarship asks whether they were actually spoken by the historical Jesus” (*The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* [New York: Paulist Press, 2004] 73).

<sup>20</sup> According to Kilian McDonnell, “from the earliest days of theological reflection *koinonia*/communion was a way of identifying the Church” (“Communion Ecclesiology and Baptism in the Spirit: Tertullian and the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 49:4 [December 1988] 691). During the early period of Vatican II, Jerome Hamer noted that “in current usage, the word ‘communion’ is still permeated with its entire history, stamped with the experience of the primitive Church” (*The Church is a Communion* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964] 175). In this book, which first appeared in 1962 in French under the title of *L’Eglise est une communion*, Hamer remarks that in the primitive Church communion “designated the relations between Church and Church, Christian and Christian”; “applied to the Church, communion has two aspects, one directed towards God, the other towards the links that unite men [*sic*] to each other.” *Ibid.*, 174, 175. Luke Timothy Johnson identifies four marks of *koinonia* understood as fellowship in the early Church: fellowship among persons, fellowship in writing, fellowship in material resources, and fellowship in convictions. See “*Koinonia*: Diversity and Unity in Early Christianity,” *Theology Digest* 46: 4 (Winter 1999) 309-10. J.-M.R. Tillard also maintains that “the nature of the Church, as early Tradition understands it” is “summed up in the communion, *koinonia*.” See *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 29. For Paul Avis, “in the New Testament, communion (*koinonia*) is grounded in baptism and comes to expression in the Lord’s Supper” (*Christians in Communion* [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990] 14). For a detailed discussion of the growth of the early Church into a communion of communions from 110 to 600 see Bernard P. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 120-75. It is worthwhile to note Schuyler Brown’s observation that “in the New Testament *koinōnia* is used abstractly (‘participation’ or ‘fellowship’), not concretely (‘community’), and consequently a direct identification between *koinōnia* and *ekklēsia* is impossible.” See “*Koinonia* as the Basis of New Testament Ecclesiology,” *One in Christ* 12 (1976) 159. Brown remarks that “not only is *koinōnia* never equated with *ekklēsia* in the New Testament, we never find the two words related to each other in any way.” *Ibid.* However, he hastens to add that “if *koinōnia* is never attributed to the Church as such in the New Testament, it is certainly attributed to Christians and may thus have at least an indirect bearing on ecclesiology.” *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops.” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 444-50. Francis George estimates that “the word *communio* appears 285 times” in the documents of Vatican II (“The Parish in the Mission of the Church,” *Chicago Studies* 46:1 [Spring 2007] 24). For him “that fact is not immediately evident when one reads the documents in English translation, because *communio* is translated in various ways: fellowship, community, fraternity.” *Ibid.* Gianfranco Ghirlanda goes further to contend that hierarchical communion “is the key to the interpretation of ecclesiology put forward by *Lumen Gentium*.” Quoted by Leonardo Boff, “The Uncompleted Vision of Vatican II: The Church – Hierarchy or People of God?” *Concilium* 3 (1999) 35. John Fuellenbach notes that “the ecclesiology of communion has been hailed as one of the achievements of Vatican II” (*Church: Community for the Kingdom* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002] 147). Fuellenbach argues that “it could be called a *paradigm shift* in the understanding of church if one compares it with the dominant ecclesiology that prevailed in the century before the council. This approach to describe the church is today known as communion ecclesiology.” *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> FABC III, *FAPA Vol. I*, 53-61.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-3.

Assembly.”<sup>24</sup> It focuses on the Church “as a community realizing its communion and mission in its own being and life, and in relation to other communities.”<sup>25</sup> Its purpose is to develop a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Church from a Trinitarian perspective, and its application on the local and community level.<sup>26</sup> The pastoral aim of the statement is “to make local communities more and more authentic communities of faith.”<sup>27</sup> Part 1 of the main text is a rapid survey of the FABC’s activities and achievements from 1972 to 1982. In Part 2 the Asian bishops explicate the identity, vocation, and mission of the Church under the rubric of “a community of faith in Asia.” In Part 3 they discuss some of the “inadequacies and failures” of the Churches in Asia. This is followed by a more optimistic turn in Part 4 where the bishops identify signs of hope and indications of the presence of the Spirit at work in ecclesial communities in Asia. Finally, in Part 5, they articulate their pastoral vision and priorities.<sup>28</sup> All in all, there are two major ecclesiological motifs treated in the documents under consideration: the vocation of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, and the mission of the Church in the world of Asia. We will now move on to discuss these themes and other related topics.

## **6.2 Vocation of the Church as a Community of Faith in Asia**

In the 1977 “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church” the bishops of Asia foresaw that, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an estimated 60% of the world population would live in Asia.<sup>29</sup> It was also evident that Asia would remain the least Christian continent in numerical terms.<sup>30</sup> It was imperative, therefore, that Asian Churches discover their own vocation and become “genuine Christian communities in Asia—

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 63-5.

<sup>25</sup> FABC III, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

<sup>26</sup> FABC III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> FABC III, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60.

<sup>28</sup> FABC III, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 49-65.

<sup>29</sup> APMC, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> APMC, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 69.

Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others.”<sup>31</sup> Later, the FABC would revisit this theme in its Third Plenary Assembly, this time providing a fuller treatment of the subject by reflecting on the nature and structures of the Church, in particular the local Church and basic ecclesial communities.

### 6.2.1 Nature of the Church

By underlining the idea of the Church as a community of faith in Asia the Asian bishops have situated their ecclesiology within the context of relationships.<sup>32</sup> For the bishops, the Church is, at its deepest level, “a communion rooted in the life of the Trinity,”<sup>33</sup> and essentially “a sacrament of the loving self-communication of God” and the graced response of redeemed people in faith, hope and charity.<sup>34</sup> It is also a community of those who are restored into communion and fellowship among themselves.<sup>35</sup> Based on this theological and anthropological definition of the

<sup>31</sup> ACMC, art. 14ii, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 70.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed treatment of this theme see Denis Edwards, “The Church as Sacrament of Relationships,” *Pacifica* 8 (1995) 185-200.

<sup>33</sup> Here we find a very close resemblance between the FABC’s statement and Vatican II teaching, e.g., *Lumen Gentium* no. 4, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 2. For Walter Kasper, “ecclesial *communio* is rooted and has its ultimate model in the Trinitarian *communio* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit: one God in three persons, a unity within plurality. The Church is, so to speak, the icon of the Trinity” (“Ecumenism: the Way Ahead,” *The Tablet* [24 May 2003] 34). The phrase “icon of the Trinity” is likely taken from Bruno Forte’s book, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity: A Brief Study*, translated by Robert Paolucci (Boston, Mass.: St. Paul Books & Media, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> FABC III, art. 7.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56. Here the FABC seems to apply the biblical meaning of the term *koinonia* to describe the nature of the Church, a notion explicated by Michael McDermott as “one of the many ways in Scripture of expressing the central Christian mystery, the union in the love of God and man through Jesus Christ. Κοινωνία is this union granting the believer the life and love of the Trinity and uniting him thereby to all fellow Christians in the same bond of divine love.” See “The Biblical Doctrine of ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 19 (1975) 222-3. Patrick Granfield notes that “*Koinonia* is derived from *koinos*: common (the opposite of *idios*: proper, particular, private). *Koinoo* means to pool or put together. In a general etymological sense, *koinonia* refers to the common sharing, participating, and possessing of something. It is often translated in Latin by *communio* or *communicatio*” (“The Church Local and Universal: Realization of Communion,” *The Jurist* 49 [1989] 450). Walter Kasper further explains “the original biblical meaning of *koinonia/communio*: having access to the same holy things, to the one Spirit, to the one Gospel, to one baptism, and one eucharist” (“The Church as Sacrament of Unity,” *Communio* 14:1 [1987] 8).

<sup>35</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 273-4.

Church,<sup>36</sup> they discuss the defining and desirable characteristics of the vocation of the Church in Asia by exploring the various relational dimensions of community and communion.<sup>37</sup> First, the Church is a local community of the faithful who are summoned by the Gospel mandate, graced and guided by the Holy Spirit in their life and activities, and nourished by prayers and discernment, above all by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the centre and heartbeat of the community.<sup>38</sup> Second, the local Church must endeavour to be a community of participation and co-responsibility, where members share and accept each other's gifts, responsibilities, talents, charisms, and ministries, and are willing to engage in "mutual listening and dialogue, common discernment in the Spirit, common witness, and collaborative action."<sup>39</sup> Third, the local Church must be in unity with its pastors, and in communion with other parishes and dioceses, the universal Church, and other faith communities.<sup>40</sup> Fourth, the overall purpose of the Church is "discipleship in the Gospel," understood not only to be reconciliation with other members of the Church, but as a commitment to the "Gospel mandate of mission" by proclamation, witness, dialogue, and service.<sup>41</sup> This Christian discipleship must be translated into projects of human development and works aimed at building up human community, the promotion and defence of human rights, and the active participation in politics and other societal endeavours.<sup>42</sup> Fifth, the Church, as a community of faith, and a community of the Gospel, must discern the active presence of the Spirit also in non-Christian communities, and cooperate with them as co-pilgrims in the search for the Absolute, and on the journey

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<sup>36</sup> In this instance the Asian bishops seem to follow the lead of Yves Congar, who, according to Anthony Oelrich, argues that "there is no ecclesiology without anthropology." See "Trinity and the Parish: Some Insights from the Theology of Yves Congar," *Chicago Studies* 46:2 (Summer 2007) 178. It is also fitting to note Karl Rahner's theological approach—as seen by Richard Lennan: "it is Rahner's understanding of life in the Church that holds the key to his theological anthropology rather than *vice versa*." See Paul D. Muray, "The Lasting Significance of Karl Rahner for Contemporary Catholic Theology," *Louvain Studies* 29:1-2 (Spring-Summer 2004) 17.

<sup>37</sup> BILA II, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 240; BIMA II, arts. 2, 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 97.

<sup>38</sup> FABC III, arts. 7.2, 7.5, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60.

<sup>39</sup> APMC, art. 23, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 72; FABC III, arts. 7.6, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60.

<sup>40</sup> FABC III, art. 7.7, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60; APMC, art. 27, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> FABC III, art. 7.9, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60.

<sup>42</sup> FABC III, art. 8.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 57.

to the kingdom of God.<sup>43</sup> Finally, the Church must become more fully a true community of prayer, inserted in the context of the times and cultures of the peoples of Asia.<sup>44</sup>

This contextual and relational view of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, which grounds the people of God on a common participation in the mystery of the Trinity and the call for communion and mission, holds a special place in the FABC's theology of the Church.<sup>45</sup> However, it does not exclude other biblical and traditional images of the Church,<sup>46</sup> e.g., basic ecclesial communities (FABC III, FABC V, FABC VII), a community of dialogue and solidarity (a recurrent theme in all FABC plenary assemblies), disciple-community (FABC VI), evangeliser (FABC I), servant (FABC VI, FABC VII, BISA 1974-86), sign and sacrament of the mystery of salvation,<sup>47</sup> sacrament of unity,<sup>48</sup> sign and instrument of communion with God and sign of unity among people,<sup>49</sup> sacrament of Jesus Christ and sacrament of the kingdom,<sup>50</sup> sacrament of peace and harmony,<sup>51</sup> people of God,<sup>52</sup> pilgrim community,<sup>53</sup> and

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<sup>43</sup> FABC III, art. 8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 57.

<sup>44</sup> FABC II, art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 31.

<sup>45</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," art. 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 273-4.

<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to recall that, in Augustine of Hippo's ecclesiology, the Church has many dimensions that "coexist side by side, without being wholly identical." See T. Johannes van Bavel, "What Kind of Church Do You Want? The Breath of Augustin's Ecclesiology," *Louvain Studies* 7:3 (Spring 1979) 147-8. Augustine's most important and recurrent themes, according to van Bavel, are the following: "the church as an institution and the church as the Christ-event"; "the church as a sociological datum and the church as the Body of Christ"; "the church in time and space and the church as the Reign of God or Kingdom of Heaven"; "the church on earth and the City of God"; "the church of our days and the church as eschatological community"; "the pure and holy church and the imperfect and sinful church." *Ibid.* 148.

<sup>47</sup> OE, "Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation," art. 49, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 204.

<sup>48</sup> FABC V, art. 7.3.2.3 (6), *FAPA Vol. 1*, 286.

<sup>49</sup> FABC V, arts. 4.2, 7.3.2.3.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282, 286; BIRA III, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120.

<sup>50</sup> OE, "Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation," art. 33, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 201; BIRA IV/6, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 304.

<sup>51</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," art. 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 273-4.

<sup>52</sup> BIMA II, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 97; BISA I, art.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 199; BIRA IV/10, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 314; BISA V, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 218.

<sup>53</sup> BIRA III, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120.

eschatological people.<sup>54</sup> For the Asian bishops, the diocese and the parish are communities of faith,<sup>55</sup> and communities of clergy and religious must become real communities of faith to provide an exemplary pattern for communities of lay people.<sup>56</sup> They also consider the family as a miniature Church, the Church in the home.<sup>57</sup> This mosaic of ecclesial images is reminiscent of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which, according to Gregory Baum, “refused to define what the Church is.”<sup>58</sup> Baum identifies six ways in which the word “Church” is used in the

<sup>54</sup> BIRA III, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120.

<sup>55</sup> Here the FABC seems to echo the view of 1983 Code of Canon Law, which states that “a parish is certain community of Christ’s faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor. See cc.515.1, *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation*, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Can Law Society (London: HarperCollins, 1997) 119. Richard Lennan notes that for Karl Rahner, “while the local community envisaged by *Lumen Gentium* was a diocese united its bishop,” the document “opened the way for the development of the theological, rather than merely canonical, approach to the parish, since it too was an altar community.” See Richard Lennan, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 153.

<sup>56</sup> FABC III: “The Syllabus of Concerns of the Plenary Assembly,” *FAPA Vol. 1*, 63.

<sup>57</sup> BIMA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104. The Latin text of *Lumen Gentium* (no. 11)—*In hac velut Ecclesia domestica...*—is translated in the work edited by Austin Flannery as “in what might be regarded as the domestic Church.” See Vatican Council II, “*Lumen Gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. edition (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 362. Dominique Nothomb notes that the concept of “Eglise-famille” occurs four times in *Lumen Gentium*, eight times in *Gaudium et Spes*, twice in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, once in *Presbyterium Ordinis*, and once in *Ad Gentes*. See “L’Eglise-famille: concept-clé du Synode des évêques pour l’Afrique: Une Réflexion théologique et pastorale,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 117 (1995) 44-5. In one of the early papers on the topic, Normand Provencher explains that there are in the Christian family many realities that are essential to the very constitution of the entire Church: Christ’s presence, the evangelising mission, a life of prayer and charity. See “Vers une théologie de la famille: l’Eglise domestique,” *Eglise et Théologie* 12 (1981) 33. Georgia Masters Keightley notes that “*Gaudium et Spes* (nos. 40, 42) refers to the church as the family of God” (“The 1987 Synod on the Laity: Four Outside Perspectives,” *The Living Light* 24:3 [March 1988] 224). However, in other texts such as *Lumen Gentium* no. 12, *Actuositatem Apostolicam* no. 11, and *Gaudium et Spes* no. 48, “the phrase ‘the domestic church’ is used to suggest that in many ways, the family is like the church.” Ibid. Therefore, Keightley concludes that “what was once an analogy is now taken for a statement of fact.” Ibid. Norbert Mette also concurs with this view asserting that “a phrase which Vatican II took up somewhat hesitantly—following John Chrysostom in describing the family as a ‘domestic church’—has become established terminology in the post-Vatican documents” (“The Family in the Teaching of the Magisterium,” *Concilium* 4 [1995] 81). For a methodical and careful advance of this argument see Joseph C. Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 592-604.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory Baum, *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) 20. In the first sentence of his book, Thomas Halton writes: “because the Church is ultimately a mystery it cannot be defined.” *The Church, Messages of the Fathers of the Church* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1985) 13.

conciliar documents.<sup>59</sup> First, “‘Church’ is equated with Catholic Church.”<sup>60</sup> Second, it “refers to the local congregation.”<sup>61</sup> Third, it means “the community of the baptised” or “the community of the followers of Christ.”<sup>62</sup> Fourth, it refers to “the people of Israel,” or “the entire Abrahamic community, the community of the called, beginning with Abraham and stretching through history.”<sup>63</sup> Fifth, speaking of the Church from Abel on,<sup>64</sup> Vatican II emphasises the wider meaning of the “Church universal” by making a double affirmation: the Church is the world-wide community of peoples “in which God creates faith and love and that Church is the Christian community in which alone Christ is proclaimed and celebrated.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, the word “Church” refers to the *ecclesia domestica*, or domestic Church.<sup>66</sup>

### 6.2.2 Structures of the Church

At their landmark colloquium on ecclesial ministries in 1977, the Asian bishops emphasised that the Church, while adhering to its basic, traditional structures, must adapt its organisational and ministerial structures to meet the needs and challenges of Asia.<sup>67</sup> Later, at the Third Plenary Assembly, they stressed that suitable structures must be implemented to facilitate the participation of lay people at the diocesan and parish levels.<sup>68</sup> For them, as a community of faith in Asia, the structures of the Church must be developed to support the evangelising mission of the Church and to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 20-8.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 21-2.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>64</sup> John Fuellenbach notes that Augustine was “the first to talk about the ‘church since Abel’.” See *The Kingdom of God: the Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995) 150.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 24-5; see also *Lumen Gentium* no. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>67</sup> ACMC, arts. 25, 27-28, *FAPA Vol. I*, 73.

<sup>68</sup> FABC III, “The Syllabus of Concerns of the Plenary Assembly,” *FAPA Vol. I*, 63.

serve the people.<sup>69</sup> Reflecting on the lay apostolate in 1986 they acknowledged that most of the efforts and services of Asian Churches had, in previous years, been unproductive as a result of a lack of active participation of the whole people of God, and they emphasised an urgent need to develop a sense of common mission and co-responsibility.<sup>70</sup> By 1995 they observed that the Churches in Asia were growing, and there was a demand for co-responsibility and full participation because the Churches were still “over-clericalized,” and at all levels there was “a lack of collaborative pastoral leadership resulting in the absence of clear direction and mutual accountability.”<sup>71</sup> For them, a re-examination and renewal of ecclesial structures must be based on the principles of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility.<sup>72</sup> In practice, this means creating the right atmosphere of communion, collegiality and co-responsibility to facilitate a fuller lay participation and action, rather than strengthening and multiplying existing organisations in the parish or the diocese, or creating new ones.<sup>73</sup> For dialogue to become “an attitude and a practice of every Christian” the Church needs to be “dialogical in its internal life and structures.”<sup>74</sup> An atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation between clergy and laity is also indispensable for the Asian Church.<sup>75</sup> In their view, many of the problems confronting the Asian Church are structural in nature and require collegial coordination of insights and initiatives at diocesan, national, and regional levels.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the Church must commit itself to a more participatory approach to witness and action, and ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is effective within the

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<sup>69</sup> OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation,” arts. 18, 24, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 197-8.

<sup>70</sup> BILA II, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 240. The bishops’ emphasis seems to derive from one of the two fundamental qualities of Vatican II’s definition of the Church as the people of God, namely, the common identity and equal dignity of all members of the Church. The other key aspect of this image, the pilgrim nature of the people of God, does not feature prominently in the FABC documents.

<sup>71</sup> OESC, “A Renewed Catechesis for Asia: Towards the year 2000 and Beyond,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 29.

<sup>72</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.5.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>74</sup> BIRA IV/12, arts. 53-54, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 333.

<sup>75</sup> BILA II, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 240.

<sup>76</sup> BISA V, art. 24, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 220.



Church.<sup>77</sup> After all, structures and institutions are only the means to support the operation and mission of the local Church.<sup>78</sup>

### 6.2.3 Local Church

For the FABC, each local Church is “the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, at a given place and time.”<sup>79</sup> It is the people of God in a given milieu,<sup>80</sup> the whole community including lay people, religious and clergy.<sup>81</sup> It is the whole diocese, the parish, and basic Christian communities, and other groups.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> BISA V, art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 220; see also OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 311. Francisco F. Claver contends that “participation” is the “single Vatican II idea” that “has led to the most radical change in the Church’s pastoral work,” and thanks to this “participatory ethic of Vatican II” there is “a vitality to the Churches in Asia.” See “The Church in Asia: Twenty and Forty Years After Vatican II,” *FABC Papers No. 117* [Part III, Section G, no pagination], <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-117.htm> (accessed 31 October 2006).

<sup>78</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 5.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 324. It is noteworthy that throughout their reflection on the structures of the Church between 1970 and 2001, the bishops of Asia never discussed explicitly one of the thorny ecclesiological and ecumenical issues, namely that of *jus divinum* or the divine institution of certain offices. For a quick glance of the Catholic doctrine on the subject see *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 20, 32; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1554, 874 (Homebush, NSW: St Pauls, 1994) 388, 231-2. For a detailed discussion of this issue see Roger Haight, “The Structures of the Church,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30:3-4 (1995) 403-14, and Neil Ormerod, “On the Divine Institution of the Three-fold Ministry,” *Ecclesiology* 4:1 (2007) 38-51.

<sup>79</sup> FABC I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14. In 1990 the Office of Theological Concerns issued a lengthy paper proposing fifteen theses on local Church as its “first attempt to formulate a theological study of ‘The Local Church in the Asian Context’,” and offering it “solely as a basis of a continuing discussion with the wider community of pastors and their professional scholars.” See “Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context,” *FAPC Papers, No. 60*, footnote on page 1. As this paper is not published in the three-volume collection of the official documents of the FABC, we will not discuss in detail its theses and arguments.

<sup>80</sup> This affirmation is reminiscent of *Lumen Gentium* (no. 26): “this Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful.”

<sup>81</sup> FABC V, art. 3.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281.

<sup>82</sup> FABC V, art. 3.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281. The FABC also considers the Christian family as a miniature Church, the Church in the home. See BIMA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104. Patrick Granfield suggests that the term “local Church” can be used in two ways. In the *strict* sense, “the local church, in which the Church of Christ is truly present, is that community of Christians called by the Holy Spirit and, under the leadership of the bishop, priests and other ministers, proclaims the Word, celebrates the Eucharist and other sacraments, and continues the redemptive work of Christ in the world.” See “The Local Church as a Center of Communication and Control,” *CTSA Proceedings* 35 (1980) 257. From this definition Granfield argues that the local Church is “primarily the diocese but it could also refer to several dioceses in the same region or nation.” *Ibid.* In the *broad* sense, “the local church may also designate the parish, ... the domestic church or family, ... and other Christian groupings (e.g., religious communities, basic Christian communities, etc.” *Ibid.*, 258. These smaller communities, says Granfield, “are not complete in themselves but are related and ordered to the local church in the full sense and are in communion with it.” *Ibid.*

These communities become fully Church only when they are incarnated in a people and culture, in a particular place and time,<sup>83</sup> and accept their share in the Church's mission.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, their mission includes, but is not limited to, "simple presence and living witness," commitment to the service of humankind and all forms of activities for human development, "liturgical life and that of prayer and contemplation," dialogue with people of other religions and participation with them in projects of common concern, and proclamation and catechesis of Jesus as saviour, and inviting people to become his disciples in the Church.<sup>85</sup>

As minority faith communities in Asia, local Churches should be entrusted to proclaim the Gospel "in their own social and cultural idioms,"<sup>86</sup> and be free to exercise their legitimate autonomy in making important decisions without undue influence from higher authority.<sup>87</sup> To bypass the contextual and to undermine the local in the name of the global and universal, the FABC warns, will have serious consequences for the life of local Churches, which should become centres animated and guided by the Spirit who works in them and leads them to understand the global and the universal.<sup>88</sup> To be Church, according to the FABC, means to be filled by the Spirit and to act with its power.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, local Churches have the duty to discern the Spirit working in their midst,<sup>90</sup> and their institutions and ministries must become

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<sup>83</sup> FABC VII, art. I.A.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> FABC V, art. 3.3.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281.

<sup>85</sup> OE, "Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation," art. 36, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 202.

<sup>86</sup> OE, "Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation," art. 20, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 198.

<sup>87</sup> OE, "Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation," arts. 20-21, 25, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 198-9. As a Vatican II *peritus*, Joseph Ratzinger already noted that, for the early Christians, "the Church was first realized in the individual local Church," and "the local Churches were not administrative branches of a large organization; they were the living cells, in each of which the whole mystery of the one body of the Church was present, so that each was simply called *Ecclesia*, Church." See *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966) 121.

<sup>88</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 5.8, *FAPA Vol.3*, 325.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 5.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 323.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 5.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 322.

truly vehicles of the Spirit, because institutions and charisms are complementary.<sup>91</sup> Each local Church expresses its evangelical identity and maturity by being a “witness, sign and sacrament of the presence of the *missio Dei* for the whole world.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore, all members of the Church, understood as a communion of communities, must form small Christian communities where they can support one another and work together in unity and love.<sup>93</sup>

#### 6.2.4 Basic Christian/Ecclesial Communities

According to the FABC, the mystery of the local Church is realised in different ways, at various levels, and in many forms such as the diocese, the parish, and basic Christian communities.<sup>94</sup> First, the diocese has a special ecclesial significance due to the ministry of unity of a presiding bishop who serves as a visible link of communion in space and time between the diocese, other local Churches, and the Church of the Apostles.<sup>95</sup> Second, the parish community, an organism for community living and shared witness, genuinely embodies the mystery of the Church, and represents an ecclesial reality, which is more basic and fundamental than that of a diocese.<sup>96</sup> Third, basic or small Christian communities are the most fundamental ecclesial realities in the Church’s life. They embody the mystery of the Church in their own right if they

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<sup>91</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 5.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 322. For Ladislaus Orsy, “Charisma and structures, although distinct, can no more be separated from each other in the Church than the flesh and blood of a human person can be separated from his bones. The skeleton, ugly and unfriendly as it is, gives support and proportion to the beauty of the flesh that covers it. Charisma and institutions must work together” (“A Theology of the Local Church and Religious Life,” *Review for Religious* 36 [1977] footnote 13, 680).

<sup>92</sup> OE, “Consultation on Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad Gentes*: A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia,” art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 222.

<sup>93</sup> FABC V, art. 8.1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287.

<sup>94</sup> APMC, arts. 38-40, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 75-6; OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 312.

<sup>95</sup> APMC, art. 38, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 75; OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 312.

<sup>96</sup> APMC, art. 39, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 75; OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 312.

are linked to the ministry of the bishop and provided with ecclesial services and ministries, including the priestly ministry.<sup>97</sup>

Of the three volumes of the official documents of the FABC, only the first and the third feature an index entry under the headings of “Basic Christian Communities” and “Basic Ecclesial Communities.”<sup>98</sup> In the index of the first volume readers are asked to check the entry under “Basic Christian Communities” rather than “Basic Ecclesial Communities.” The index of the third volume lists them as two separate headings, even though in later statements, the bishops of Asia tend to use “Basic Ecclesial Communities” in preference to “Basic Christian Communities.”<sup>99</sup> Occasionally they use the term “small Christian communities” to include basic ecclesial communities, neighbourhood groups, and covenant communities.<sup>100</sup> They also acknowledge that these communities are varied and known by different names in different places.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> ACMC, art. 40, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 75-6; OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol.3*, 313.

<sup>98</sup> *FAPA Vol. 1*, 249; *FAPA Vol. 3*, 433. According to Leonardo Boff, “Base ecclesial communities (sometimes referred to as basic Christian communities) are a phenomenon that has its origin in Latin America, where they were given their name *comunidades eclesiales de base* because they are communities primarily comprised of lower-class, grassroots people, the base of society, as opposed to the pinnacle of power in the social pyramid” (Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* [New York: Crossroad, 1985] 125).

<sup>99</sup> FABC V, art. 8.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287; FABC VII, Part 3.C.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 15.

<sup>100</sup> FABC V, art. 8.1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287.

<sup>101</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol.3*, 313. For Marcelo de C. Azevedo, “the currently so-called Basic Communities, Basic Christian Communities, Grassroots Christian Communities, or Basic Ecclesial Communities in different parts of the world share some common and fundamental features” (“Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies,” *Theological Studies* 46:4 [December 1985] 601). Analysing the experience of Basic Christian Communities in Latin America and Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa, Peter Mariackan observes that “the shape, goals and functions of these communities have been influenced by their social environment.” See “A Comparison between Basic Christian Communities in Latin America and Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa: A Theological-Pastoral Reflection,” in “Chronicles,” compiled by Merrigan, Terrence, *Louvain Studies* 23:4 (Winter 1998) 364. Mariackan also notes that “while Latin American experience has issued in liberation theology, African theology tends to highlight inculturation.” Ibid. We argue that Mariackan’s assertion requires qualification as there has been “a growing interest in the subject” of inculturation by the Latin American bishops. See Fernando Castillo, “Christianity and Inculturation in Latin America,” *Concilium* 2 (1994) 74. Castillo observes that while at Medellín (1968) the main concern was “the situation of injustice, crisis and social conflict affecting the continent,” at Puebla (1979) “the bishops devoted a whole section of the final documents to ‘The Evangelization of Culture (nos. 385-443),’ and in the Santo Domingo (1992) document, “the subject of the evangelization of culture takes up even more space.” Ibid., 74-6. For Casiano Floristán, “after the Second Vatican Council, basic ecclesial communities began to emerge in South America as new models of the Church and these found their original impetus in the five-year Overall Pastoral Plan announced by the Brazilian Bishops towards the end of 1965. At Medellín, these communities received official approval. The way in which they have spread throughout South America in conjunction with

Hence, in this chapter both terms will be employed depending on their occurrences and context.

The Asian bishops describe basic Christian communities by explaining the qualifying terms “basic” and “Christian.” For them, a group of people is considered a “basic” community when they are small in numbers, meet regularly, know each other well, care, share, and provide support for each other.<sup>102</sup> These basic communities become “Christian” communities when they are modelled and centred on Jesus, worship together, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, and collaborate to build a community of peace, justice, freedom, truth, and love.<sup>103</sup> In response to questions and tensions raised by the fact that basic Christian communities are usually under lay leadership, they propose a shared participative leadership style for these communities which they hope will be conducive to consultation, dialogue, and sharing.<sup>104</sup> For basic Christian communities to avoid the risk of becoming “inward-looking and too exclusive” the bishops stress that they must be linked with the larger community, namely the parish, the diocese, and the universal Church.<sup>105</sup>

According to the FABC, in the Asian context, basic Christian communities can provide the best environment for individuals to survive, grow, and develop their faith.<sup>106</sup> These communities are formed because individual Christians have a need for

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the development of liberation theology has been quite remarkable.” See “The Models of the Church which Underlie Pastoral Action,” *Concilium* 176 (1984) 74.

<sup>102</sup> APMC, art. 44, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 76.

<sup>103</sup> APMC, art. 45, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 77. The FABC’s view of Basic Christian Communities highlights two ecclesiological aspects: “one intra-ecclesial and the other extra-ecclesial” as observed by Clodovis Boff in “The Nature of Basic Christian Communities,” *Concilium* 144 (April 1981) 55. In this brilliant paper Clodovis Boff discusses the structure of Basic Christian Communities, their ecclesiology, and their theological methodology. *Ibid.*, 53-8. He mentions three characteristics of Basic Christian Communities: “they are communities of the poor, communities of the Word, and communities in the people’s Church. Poor, Word, People—these define the ecclesiological character” of Basic Christian Communities. *Ibid.*, 55-6.

<sup>104</sup> APMC, art. 46, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 77.

<sup>105</sup> BIMA II, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 99; APMC, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 77. Here the FABC seems to take to heart Paul VI’s insistence that “ecclesial basic communities” in the true sense of the word must remain within the unity of the Church, and hence can become “nursery of evangelization” and “a source of hope for the universal church.” *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

<sup>106</sup> APMC, art. 49, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 77.

interpersonal relationships and communal belonging.<sup>107</sup> This need is, in turn, due to a number of factors,<sup>108</sup> e.g., existing parish structures are not conducive to intensive Christian life<sup>109</sup>; insufficient priests are available to assist parishioners; Christians need a stronger sense of belonging and support if they live in a non-Christian environment; parishioners are taking more and more responsibility for the Church and serve in various ministries; and there is more urgency for Christian witness in situations where ideological struggles occur.<sup>110</sup>

In sum, communion is a fundamental theme that underlines the FABC's theology of the Church as a community of faith in Asia. Indeed, by highlighting the vocation of the Church as a communion rooted in the Trinity, the Asian bishops wish to emphasise that the Church in Asia is brought into existence and sustained by the salvific mystery of the Trinitarian life. Hence its ecclesial structures, conceived as a means to an end, must become flexible, dialogical, and participative to support the reality of the local Church as communion and mission. In the context of Asia, basic ecclesial communities, one of the most fundamental forms of the ecclesial structures of the local Church, are a privileged way in which Asian Christians live and express their ecclesial responsibility *ad intra* of communion and *ad extra* of mission.

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<sup>107</sup> APMC, art. 41, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 76.

<sup>108</sup> Leonardo Boff suggests that "the rise of the basic communities is also due to the crisis in the church institution" (*Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* [London: Collins, 1986] 2).

<sup>109</sup> For Francisco F. Claver, "participation at all levels and in all areas of community life is of the essence of the BEC," and "this contrasts sharply with the traditional parish which is by definition hierarchical in structure and function and rather minimalist as far as lay participation is concerned." See "The Church in Asia: Twenty and Forty Years After Vatican II." *FABC Papers No. 117* [Part III, Section G, no pagination], <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-117.htm> (accessed 31 October 2006). Claver stresses that "the best criterion for judging to what extent the ethic of participation has caught in any Church is to see whether and how far the concept of the BEC—the basic ecclesial community—has been accepted in practice." Ibid. Elsewhere, Claver defines the nature of basic ecclesial community as "a community of faith, worshiping [*sic*], discerning, acting, in all this working consciously and participatively at putting faith and life together into an integral whole under the guidance of the Spirit." See "A Third World Story on Oppression, the Laity and Basic Ecclesial Communities," *Origins* 25:5 (15 June 1995) 83.

<sup>110</sup> APMC, art. 42, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 76.

### 6.3 Mission of the Church in the World of Asia

There is no doubt that the evangelising mission has been a central leitmotif of the entire corpus of the FABC who chose it as the topic of discussion for its first Plenary Assembly in 1974, and examined its various dimensions in subsequent plenary meetings and documents.<sup>111</sup> The fourth Plenary Assembly in 1986, for instance, reflected on lay vocation and mission, and firmly placed the laity at the centre of the Church's evangelising mission in the world—not a passive laity who must always take orders from the clergy, but a laity whose competence to evangelise the contemporary society is recognised in its own right. This section discusses the FABC's view on the nature, purpose, orientation, and mode of the Church's mission against the background of an assessment of the status of the Church in Asia.

#### 6.3.1 Status of the Church in Asia

For the FABC, Asian Christians, who make up the Church in Asia, are bound inextricably to the peoples of Asia by “a common history and a common destiny.”<sup>112</sup> To the peoples of this continent, which is “marked by swift and far-reaching transformation,”<sup>113</sup> it is incumbent on the Asian Church to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. So it is only natural that when reflecting on the Church at their Third Plenary Assembly, the Asian bishops reviewed the status of the Asian Church and its activities in the world of Asia. In doing so they recognised the deficiencies of the Church, but also highlighted its positive signs. First, they acknowledged that there has been a lack of “interiorisation of, and conversion to, the teaching of the Gospel and the Council on authentic Christian community.”<sup>114</sup> Second, there is often inadequate manifestation of true communion, participation, co-responsibility, and Christlike service in the

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<sup>111</sup> FABC I, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 11-25; ACMC, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 67-92; FABC II, arts. 21-27, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 33-4; FABC III, arts. 5, 7, 15-17.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55-6, 60-1; FABC IV, arts. 4.0.1- 4.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191-4; FABC V, arts. 3.0-9.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279-89; FABC VI, arts. 3, 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 2-3, 7-10; FABC VII, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 1-16.

<sup>112</sup> FABC I, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13.

<sup>113</sup> FABC I, arts. 4, 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13.

<sup>114</sup> FABC III, art. 9.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 57.

exercise of authority.<sup>115</sup> Third, the Church still projects a strongly institutional rather than communitarian image, while Church groups remain individualistic, and lay people's gifts, charisms, and co-responsibility are not often recognised, accepted, and translated into important ministries and apostolate works.<sup>116</sup> Fourth, formation in Vatican II's ecclesiology—which is of critical importance and urgency for the entire people of God—has often not yet been provided.<sup>117</sup> Fifth, “there is little or no prayer even in religious houses,” insufficient clergy guidance in the practice of prayer, and a lack of esteem for spiritual values, which are highly regarded by Asians.<sup>118</sup> Sixth, there is little appreciation and formation in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.<sup>119</sup> Seventh, in terms of the social teaching of the Church, formation has often been inadequate, local communities have failed to become aware of social injustices, and the Church has too often been indifferent and hesitant in supporting projects of human development and liberation, promotion of human rights, and protection of the poor and the oppressed.<sup>120</sup> Eighth, ecclesial communities have seldom denounced injustices committed against women, the poor, and the less educated in exploitative

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<sup>115</sup> FABC III, art. 9.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 57. Here the FABC seems to use the term authority in a sociological sense; hence, it is worthwhile to recall Max Weber's classic definition of authority (*Herrschaft*) as the “probability that a command with a given content will be obeyed by a given group of persons.” See *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Grundrisse der Sozialökonomie, 1947) 28; quoted by John A. Coleman in “Authority, Power, Leadership: Sociological Understandings,” *New Theological Review* 10 (1997) 31. Richard Lennan reminds us that “authority in the church exists to promote and maintain the ecclesial community” (“Leadership, Authority and Power: Issues in *Communio* Ecclesiology,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 76:2 [April 1999] 158).

<sup>116</sup> FABC III, art. 9.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 57.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 9.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 58.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 9.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 58.

<sup>119</sup> FABC III, art. 9.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 58. Louis J. Luzbetak observes that ecumenical dialogue is one of the main emphases of Vatican II, according to which “the general mission of the Church is threefold: (1) pastoral—a ministry to the faithful, (2) ecumenical—a ministry to divided Christianity, and (3) missionary—a ministry to areas where the Church has not yet been planted or where it is not yet fully established. Moreover, this ministry is to be exercised by the *whole* Church, not only by the clergy but the laity as well, who participate in Jesus' prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission in their own right as Christians.” See *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 12 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988) 131.

<sup>120</sup> FABC III, art. 9.7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 58.



industries, such as sex tourism.<sup>121</sup> Finally, missionary consciousness and responsibility have been woefully insufficient.<sup>122</sup>

Even amidst these shortcomings and deficiencies, however, the FABC discerned signs of the presence and action of the Spirit in Christian communities.<sup>123</sup> There is a longing for prayer and contemplation, especially among the youth. There is also a desire for communal study and reflection on the Bible. The Eucharist is increasingly celebrated and experienced as the centre of Christian life. More people are willing to lead a life of simplicity, and to experience poverty as a following of Jesus and as a solidarity with the suffering and the poor. Communities are increasingly committed to projects of human development and works aimed to promote justice and human rights. There is a rapid proliferation of basic ecclesial communities, which foster genuine Christian fellowship and love, and the growth of charisms and ministries. New missionary initiatives are being undertaken by Church members, especially lay people. There is a numerical growth in many Asian Churches, and also an increase in religious and priestly vocations. Finally, sustained by the power of the Spirit, Christians in Churches, which suffer from isolation, silence and persecution, are able to maintain steadfast fidelity and admirable perseverance.<sup>124</sup> These positives and negatives constitute the context for the FABC's reflection on the mission of local Churches in Asia at its Third Plenary Assembly. This mission, as outlined by the FABC, displays several interconnected features, five of which deserve special consideration: the priority and centrality of evangelisation, a focus on building up the kingdom of God, a mission directed to the world, the triple dialogue as mode of mission, and the promotion of social justice as an integral part of evangelisation.

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<sup>121</sup> FABC III, art. 9.8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 58.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 9.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 58.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 10-13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 59.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

### 6.3.2 Characteristics of Mission

In the documents of the FABC, mission is a multifaceted concept, distinct from evangelisation,<sup>125</sup> but in practical terms, “mission” and ‘evangelisation’ are often used interchangeably or in a combined form as “evangelizing mission.”<sup>126</sup> Gathering in April 1974 to reflect on the topic of evangelisation, in preparation for the Synod of Bishops due to be held later in the year,<sup>127</sup> the Asian bishops stated that they had no intention to develop “a full theology of the proclamation of the Gospel” but merely aimed to delve into the tasks that evangelisation demands of the Church in the Asian context.<sup>128</sup> They reiterated and further developed these themes in 1977, when they emphasised the triple priority of the Church, namely, evangelisation, service of the kingdom of God, and promotion of social justice.<sup>129</sup>

### Evangelisation as the Highest Priority of Mission

For the Asian bishops, the Church exists in order to evangelise,<sup>130</sup> and to evangelise is to proclaim “by word and witness the Gospel of the Lord,”<sup>131</sup> and that means “first and foremost to communicate the experience of the Risen Christ.”<sup>132</sup> To proclaim

<sup>125</sup> BIRA IV/4, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 304; OEIA, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 167.

<sup>126</sup> FABC V, arts. 3.0-4.0, 3.2.7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279-282, 281; FABC VII, Part. III, Part III.A.1, Part III.C.3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8-15, 10, 13.

<sup>127</sup> FABC I, art. 1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 12.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13.

<sup>129</sup> APMC, art. 16-19, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 71.

<sup>130</sup> FABC V, art. 3.2.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281. Richard Gaillardetz observes that “contemporary ecclesiology tends to reject the common view that Jesus first instituted a church and then gave it a mission. It would be biblically and theologically more accurate to say that Jesus established a mission in the world and then called forth a community of disciples for the fulfilment of that mission” (“The Theology Underlying Lay Ecclesial Ministry,” *Origins* 36:9 [20 July 2006] 140).

<sup>131</sup> FABC I, art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 16; FABC II, art. 21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 33; OEIA, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 167. Pope Benedict XVI teaches that “the church’s deepest nature is expressed in her threefold responsibility of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*) and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable” (“*Deus Caritas Est*: Encyclical,” *Origins* 35:33 [2 February 2006] 550).

<sup>132</sup> FABC I, art. 30, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 16.

Jesus Christ, they affirmed again, is the central and primary element of evangelisation, and indeed “the first call to the Churches in Asia.”<sup>133</sup> In Asia, it is a task which has assumed “an urgency, a necessity and a magnitude” unparalleled in the Asian Church’s entire journey of faith.<sup>134</sup> To face the changing face of Asian societies and the challenges of Asia with its vastness, number, complexity, and tenacity of problems, the Asian Church requires a renewal of the sense of evangelising mission,<sup>135</sup> by renewing the faith that deepens the motivations for mission.<sup>136</sup> These motivations include a deep sense of gratitude to God, the mandate of mission, a belief in Jesus as Lord, the incorporation by baptism into the Church which is missionary by nature, and the Gospel which is the leaven for liberation and transformation of society.<sup>137</sup> Renewal of the sense of mission also means that local Churches, as acting subjects of mission, must live and act in communion with the universal Church, and in response to the needs of the peoples of Asia.<sup>138</sup> Hence, the primary task of evangelisation is to build up local Churches, for through them the Gospel message may become truly incarnate in the minds and lives of Asian people.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, in a marked break with the pre-Vatican II understanding of mission (*missio ad gentes*), a theological paradigm that is, in Peter C. Phan’s view, “predicated upon two basic concepts, i.e., salvation of souls and planting the Church,”<sup>140</sup> the FABC concludes

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<sup>133</sup> FABC V, art. 4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282.

<sup>134</sup> FABC I, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13; FABC V, art. 4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281.

<sup>135</sup> FABC V, arts. 2.3.9, 3.1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 280.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 3.2.1-3.2.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 280-1.

<sup>138</sup> FABC I, art. 3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281.

<sup>139</sup> FABC I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14. We argue that in this sense the FABC’s injunction to build up the local Churches do not necessarily mean to expand the Church (*plantatio ecclesiae*)—by creating more and more communities—but to strengthen existing local Churches—by way of inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and human development—to make them become authentic communities of faith, hope, and charity, in short, communities geared towards promoting the kingdom of God, and thereby becoming more credible witnesses to the Church as the sign of universal salvation.

<sup>140</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Christian Social Spirituality: A Global Perspective,” in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, edited by Philomena Cullen, Bernard House and Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2007) 34. Phan provides a helpful remark that “mission as saving souls” is inspired primarily by Matthew 18:19-20, the Lord’s command to go and make disciples of all nations, and “mission as church-planting (*plantatio ecclesiae*)” is based on Luke 14:23, the story about the master’s order for his servants to invite everybody in the streets to his banquet. *Ibid.* 34; see also his earlier paper, “Asian Christian Spirituality: Context and Contour,” *Spiritus* 6 (2006) 225.

that evangelisation is after all the witness of local Churches to the values of the kingdom of God in contemporary Asia.<sup>141</sup>

### **Mission as Building up the Kingdom of God**

Indeed, for the Asian bishops, the Church is primarily “a faith community, expressing and proclaiming Kingdom values.”<sup>142</sup> Echoing *Lumen Gentium* no. 5, they affirm that the Church exists for the kingdom<sup>143</sup> and its mission is to build up and to serve the kingdom of God.<sup>144</sup> To be at the service of the kingdom is to announce Jesus Christ and “to work to make the Kingdom of God a reality” by promoting “justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood” in Asia.<sup>145</sup> Hence, the challenge for the Asian Church is to work for justice and peace with other Christians, followers of other religions, and people of goodwill “to make the Kingdom of God more visibly present in Asia.”<sup>146</sup> All activities within and outside the Church are part and parcel of the

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<sup>141</sup> FABC V, art. 4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282.

<sup>142</sup> OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation,” art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 199.

<sup>143</sup> BIRA IV/2, arts. 8.1-8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 252. The FABC tends to use kingdom of God and reign of God interchangeably; for instance, in two successive sentences it affirms that “the Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom.” BIRA IV/2, arts. 8.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 252.

<sup>144</sup> OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation,” art. 31, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 200. The FABC’s distinction between the Church and the kingdom, to quote John Fuellenbach, “connects the historical liberation of the oppressed in this world and the eschatological kingdom still to come in fullness at the end.” See “The Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God,” in *The Convergence of Theology: A Festschrift Honoring Gerald O’Collins, S.J.*, edited by John Fuellenbach (New York: Paulist Press, 2001) 231.

<sup>145</sup> OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation,” art. 33, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 201; FABC V, arts. 1.7, 3.2.7, 4.6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275, 281-2. Here, the FABC seems to adopt the contemporary understanding of the plural term “missions,” the Church’s activities that aim to serve “God’s Kingdom of truth, love, and justice.” See Peter C. Phan, “Christian Social Spirituality: A Global Perspective,” in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, edited by Philomena Cullen, Bernard House and Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2007) 35. For Phan, this interpretation is based on Luke 4:18-19, “which speaks of Jesus’ mission of preaching the Good News to the poor, releasing the captives, giving sight to the blind, setting the oppressed free and proclaiming the favourable year of the Lord.” Ibid. Like David J. Bosch, Phan explains the singular term of “mission” as “God the Father’s own ‘mission’ or activities in history through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit (*missio Dei*).” Ibid., 34; see also David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991) 1. John Fuellenbach remarks that “the best biblical description is given in Paul: ‘for the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).’” See *The Kingdom of God: the Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995) 155.

<sup>146</sup> FABC V, art. 2.3.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279.

royal function of the Church, and have a constructive value in the building up of the kingdom in the world of Asia.<sup>147</sup> These activities have as the ultimate purpose the transformation of the world of Asia.

### **Mission to the World of Asia**

At the Third Plenary Assembly the Asian bishops affirmed that the Church as community realises its communion and mission not only in its own being and life but also in relation to other communities that live with in the Asian continent,<sup>148</sup> the theatre in which “the drama of Asia’s salvation is enacted.”<sup>149</sup> Therefore, the Church has to review its priorities and redirect its energies to undertake the journey as an outward-looking community.<sup>150</sup> The Gospel that the Church proclaims must also be the leaven for liberation and transformation of society.<sup>151</sup> Like Vatican II, this statement shows a close connection between two fundamental activities of the Church: proclaiming the Gospel (*Ad Gentes*) and seeking the good of people (*Gaudium et Spes*). It also brings into relief the bishops’ embrace of the *saeculum* as the place of Christian vocation and mission. Indeed, they have often called for an increased involvement of lay people in the social and political domains, and a greater attention to the life and role of women in the Church and the world, as well as the future of the family in the Asian context.<sup>152</sup> They go even further to promote the responsibility of all members for the life of the Church and the realisation of its mission in the world of Asia by way of a triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor.<sup>153</sup> This emphasis on triple dialogue suggests that, unlike

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<sup>147</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>148</sup> FABC III, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

<sup>149</sup> FABC V, arts. 1.6, 3.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275, 279; BILA III, art. 13.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 245.

<sup>150</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192.

<sup>151</sup> FABC V, art. 3.2.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 281.

<sup>152</sup> FABC III, art. 17.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60.

<sup>153</sup> FABC VII, arts. Part I.A.8, Part I.B, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4, 5, 8-9. We argue that the FABC’s theology of proclamation and triple dialogue, and its understanding of the Church’s mission to the world, avoid the narrow interpretations of the relation between religious identity and political/social mission identified by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza: i. Improper mission: “the Church’s mission to the world is often contrasted with its proper religious mission; in this view the social or political mission is

Vatican II, which viewed the world mainly as the modern world, “the situation of the larger and richer countries,” the FABC’s understanding of the world encompasses the three worlds proposed by John XXIII in his preparatory speeches prior to the Council, namely, the modern world with its values and norms, the Christian and religious world, and the world of the poor.<sup>154</sup> We argue that for the FABC, the Church in Asia must always work and give public witness within or against the world of Asia, and never without it.

### **Mission as Triple Dialogue**

This evangelising mission, the Asian bishops further added, demands from the Church an integrated approach as it faces the massive and complex needs and issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>155</sup> For them, evangelisation, “the Asian-ness of the Church,” dialogue, inculturation, liberation, justice and the option for the poor are issues that can no longer be addressed individually, but all are aspects of the Church’s mission of love and service.<sup>156</sup> To evangelise is to be in a continuous, humble, and loving dialogue with all the life-realities of Asian people, their traditions, their cultures, their religions, and especially the poor.<sup>157</sup> Firstly, then, there is a dialogue with the religious traditions which form an integral part of the histories and cultures of Asian nations.<sup>158</sup> In a striking statement made in 1974—well before the irruption of the controversy surrounding the issue whether non-Christian religions exist *de jure* or *de facto*—the FABC declared that these religions have “significant and positive elements in the

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inauthentic”; ii. Substitutive mission: the Church engages in the “subsidiary and temporary” social activities such as schools, hospitals, welfare organisations, etc., as a substitute for the political structure of society; iii. Unofficial mission: a proposal to “overcome the dichotomy between religious and social mission by arguing for an unofficial social mission”; iv. Partial mission: this approach maintains that “it is inadequate to refer to the Church’s mission as if mission were a singular, monolithic function.” See “The Church’s Religious Identity and Its Social and Political Mission,” *Theological Studies* 43:2 (June 1982) 197-204.

<sup>154</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Church of the Poor,” *The Month* (July 1989) 264.

<sup>155</sup> FABC VII, art. Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

<sup>156</sup> FABC VII, art. Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8; BIRA IV/12, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 333; FABC I, art. 23, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 16.

<sup>157</sup> FABC I, arts. 12, 14, 16, 19-20, 26-28, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14-6; FABC V, art. 3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 280; FABC VI, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2; IMC, art. 19, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 131.

<sup>158</sup> FABC I, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14.

economy of God's *design* of salvation" [emphasis added].<sup>159</sup> For the Asian bishops, interreligious dialogue flows from the nature of the Church,<sup>160</sup> and while it is not a tool or an instrument for mission and evangelisation,<sup>161</sup> it must always be open to proclamation.<sup>162</sup> We suggest that these simple statements lie at the heart of the FABC's theology of religions. Secondly, there is a dialogue with the Asian cultures, as the primary focus of evangelisation is to make "the message and life of Jesus truly incarnate in the minds and lives."<sup>163</sup> Thirdly, there is a dialogue with the poor, as evangelisation must be by "word and witness," and "dialogue and deeds."<sup>164</sup> This dialogue of life requires Asian Christians to feel and act with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor, and in union with other Christians and with adherents of other faiths.<sup>165</sup> Through this process of conscientisation, which seeks to change unjust social structures, the dialogue of life leads to "a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice" in Asian societies.<sup>166</sup> With this recurrent emphasis on the three-fold dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia, we could characterise the FABC's theology of the Church as an ecclesiology of triple dialogue.

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<sup>159</sup> FABC I, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14. For a detailed discussion on this issue see *inter alia* International Theological Commission, "Christianity and the World Religions," *Origins* 27:10 (14 August 1997) 149, 151-66; Gavin D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002); Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997); *Christianity and the Religions*, translated by Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001); Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002); Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004); Michael Amaladoss, "Pluralism of Religions and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Asia," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 56 (2001) 1-14; Jacob Kavunkal, "Mission in the Context of Other Religions," *Vidyajyoti* 64 (2000) 917-27; Hans Küng, "Christ, Our Light, and World Religions," *Theology Digest* 42:3 (Fall 1995) 215-9; Aloysius Pieris, "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," *The Month* (April 1993) 129-34.

<sup>160</sup> BIRA IV/4, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 300.

<sup>161</sup> BIRA VI, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 304.

<sup>162</sup> BIRA VII, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 310.

<sup>163</sup> FABC I, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14.

<sup>164</sup> FABC I, art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 16; FABC III, art. 17.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60; FABC V, arts. 4.1-4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282; OEIA, "Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia," art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 167; see also FABC VI, arts. 3, 15, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2, 10; FABC III, arts. 17.3-17.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60-1.

<sup>165</sup> FABC VII, art. Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8; see also BISA VI, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 225, and FABC IV, art. 3.1.11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 181.

<sup>166</sup> FABC I, art. 21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 15.

## Mission as Promotion of Social Justice

In Asia, the Asian bishops acknowledge, the social question is “a matter of life and death.”<sup>167</sup> For them, working for social justice is an activity integral to evangelisation.<sup>168</sup> They propose that education for social justice and action at the diocesan level be promoted, and a Social Justice Sunday dedicated to emphasise the Church’s teachings on justice, human rights and freedom.<sup>169</sup> The Church, they affirm, has to make every effort to implement its social teachings, and where necessary be ready to take radical stands in favour of social justice and human freedom.<sup>170</sup> It must also work for justice and peace with other Christians, other believers, and people of goodwill “to make the Kingdom of God more visibly present in Asia.”<sup>171</sup> In their view, which mirrors the teachings of Vatican II,<sup>172</sup> human values such as “life, dignity, equality, justice and social order” are values of the kingdom of God.<sup>173</sup> We argue that by focusing on the dialogue of life, the practical and day to day collaboration with all peoples of good will, regardless of their cultures, religions, and ethnicity, with the aim to build up the kingdom of God, the FABC’s conception of mission encompasses, not only the *missio ad gentes* (mission to the peoples, i.e., proclamation) and the *missio inter gentes* (mission among the peoples, i.e., dialogue with other cultures and religions), but also the *missio cum gentibus* (mission with other peoples, i.e., dialogue with other peoples, especially the poor).<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> APMC, art. 18, iii., *FAPA Vol. 1*, 71.

<sup>168</sup> BISA III, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 208; BISA IV, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 212.

<sup>169</sup> FABC III, “The ‘Syllabus of Concerns’ of the Plenary Assembly,” *FAPA Vol. 1*, 63.

<sup>170</sup> BISA III, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 208.

<sup>171</sup> FABC V, art. 2.3.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279.

<sup>172</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 36.

<sup>173</sup> BISA IV/12, arts. 29-30, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 330.

<sup>174</sup> The term “*missio cum gentibus*” is taken from the abstract of Lawrence Abraham Kadaliyil’s doctoral thesis: “Toward a Relational Spirit Ecclesiology in Asia: A Study on the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences,” (Th.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 2006). For a detailed discussion of the concepts of *missio ad gentes* and *missio inter gentes* in the FABC’s documents see Jonathan Yun-ka Tan, “*Missio ad gentes*’ in Asia: A Comparative Study of the Missiology of John Paul II and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC),” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2002); “Approaches to Christian Mission in Asia,” *Vidyajyoti*



In summary, for the FABC, the vocation of the Church is to become a community of faith in Asia, a communion rooted in the Trinity. Its mission is to build up the kingdom of God, its priority the proclamation of the Word of God, its orientation the world, and its mode of mission the triple dialogue and the promotion of justice. Indeed, as God's eschatological people in pilgrimage, the Church in Asia has to proclaim the Gospel and the kingdom of God to all, and calls them to radical conversion and commitment to God and to join the community of Jesus in his Church.<sup>175</sup> As the sacrament of the union with God and of the unity of all peoples, the Church promotes the fulfilment which is God's will and gift for all peoples.<sup>176</sup> The world of Asia, encompassing all familial, social, professional, political, economic, religious, and cultural spheres, is the primary field of its evangelising mission, which includes building community and serving what concerns the person and the common good.<sup>177</sup> Its mode of mission involves the threefold dialogue with Asian religions, Asian cultures, and the realities of people's daily struggles, joys, dreams, and hopes aiming to promote social justice. We argue that by adopting this dialogical and missionary posture, with a focus on the *humanum* and the *mundum*, the FABC has decidedly explicated the mission of the Church as a community of faith in Asia and not as a social institution, and in the process, has anchored the relationship between the Church and the world on the quality and credibility of Christian witness in the world of Asia. Indeed, from its basic definition of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, a theological and contextual conception of the Church which is overlaid by an anthropological understanding, the FABC has developed a range of descriptions of the

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67:3 (March 2003) 214-29; "Approaches to Christian Mission in Asia. II," *Vidyajyoti* 67:4 (April 2003) 272-84. The phrase *missio inter gentes* was coined by William R. Burrows, who argues that "today's missional era is one in which *missio inter gentes* is increasingly the paradigm within which *missio ad gentes* is carried on." See "A Response to Michael Amaladoss," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 56 (2001) 15-20, and "Intercultural Formation for Mission: *Missio Ad et Inter Gentes*," *Australian EJournal of Theology* 11 (March 2008) 1-22; available on line at <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/> (accessed 10 August 2008).

<sup>175</sup> BIRA III, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> BIRA IV/2, art. 8.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 253. By taking this theological posture, the Asian Church envisaged by the FABC can rightly be called a "public Church" in the sense that "it accepts social responsibility for the common good and envisions its teaching role as a participation in the wider societal debate." See J. Bryan Hehir, "Church-State and Church-World: The Ecclesiological Implications," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 41 (1986) 64.

Church such as communion-in-mission, community of dialogue and solidarity, disciple-community, and basic ecclesial communities. An investigation into the FABC's development of these ecclesiological models for the Asian Church will be the object of the next section.

#### **6.4 Continuity and Development in the FABC's Ecclesiology**

Since the Third Plenary Assembly in 1982, the FABC has increasingly turned its attention towards creating and promoting a new way of being Church in Asia, which is expressed by four ecclesiological foci: Church as communion-in-mission, as community of dialogue and solidarity, as community of disciples, and as basic ecclesial communities.<sup>178</sup> These ecclesiological understandings do not destroy or reduce, but clarify and complement its primary definition of the Church as a community of faith in Asia by relating and re-ordering the reality of the Church to the faith experience and the pastoral and missionary needs of the Christians of Asia. Firstly, the FABC documents offered a deeper reflection on the interplay between communion and mission, envisaging the Church as communion-in-mission, or community on mission. Secondly, they put an increased emphasis on the notions of dialogue and solidarity focusing on social justice and the preferential option for the poor. Thirdly, they brought into prominence the concept of discipleship to explore the nature of the Church as a community of disciples. Finally, they actualise all these paradigmatic ecclesiological notions into the construct of basic ecclesial communities.

##### **6.4.1 Church as Communion-in-Mission**

In their earlier statements the Asian bishops often employed the concepts of communion and mission, but only after the Third Plenary Assembly did they coin the term communion-in-mission, or Church-in-mission, to refer to the identity and role of

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<sup>178</sup> Edwin E. Mercado identifies five images of the Church in the documents of the FABC issued up to 1991: "Church as Evangelizer," "Church as a Disciple in the Gospel," "Church as Servant," "Church as Sacrament," "Church as Community." See "Emerging Images of the Asian Church," *Philippiniana Sacra* 26:76 (1991) 77-94. This paper was condensed in *Theology Digest* 39:2 (Summer 1992) 143-6.

the Church.<sup>179</sup> For them, in the Church as communion, “all members of the Church are anointed in the Spirit, and called to bear witness to the Church as mystery, to strengthen and promote communion of faith, and to commit themselves in co-responsibility to the one mission of the Church.”<sup>180</sup> The Church in Asia is a community on mission,<sup>181</sup> and evangelisation, which involves the very being of the Church, is its central task.<sup>182</sup> The Asian bishops noticed that, thanks to Vatican II there has been a new understanding of mission in Asia, consisting of an open attitude to all religions and cultures, and a consciousness of the Churches as local communities on mission.<sup>183</sup> In our view, this concept of communion-in-mission expresses the core of the mystery and the inner cohesion of the Church in Asia, and is a fundamental idea of the FABC’s ecclesiology after the Third Plenary Assembly. It reflects an ecclesiological shift at Vatican II which began its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church with a chapter on the mystery of the Church understood in a Trinitarian framework.<sup>184</sup> It is also linked to, and complemented by, the FABC’s conception of the Church as dialogue and solidarity, an ecclesiological model that will be explicated in the next section.

#### 6.4.2 Church as Dialogue and Solidarity

Indeed, alongside the emphasis on the vocation of the Church as communion-in-mission, there is a correlative focus of the FABC on the Church’s mission in Asia as a community of dialogue and solidarity. We note that this focus was based on the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which conceives a Church-world relationship in terms of dialogue and reading the signs of the times, and stresses that dialogue and solidarity are the two

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<sup>179</sup> OE, “Consultation on Evangelization and Communication,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 210; OE, “Consultation on Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad Gentes*: A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia,” arts. 8-9, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 222.

<sup>180</sup> OESC, “Seminar for Rectors and Spiritual Directors of Asian Seminaries,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 25; OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 311.

<sup>181</sup> OE, “Consultation on ‘Evangelization and Inculturation’,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 216.

<sup>182</sup> FABC V, art. 6.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 283; OE, “Consultation on ‘Evangelization and Inculturation’,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 218.

<sup>183</sup> OE, “Consultation on ‘Evangelization and Inculturation’,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 217.

<sup>184</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 1, 2-4.

hallmarks of the Church's engagement with the human condition.<sup>185</sup> This section will trace the development of each of these concepts separately through a chronological survey of the final statements of the FABC Plenary Assemblies, and for the theme of solidarity, also the statements of BISA meetings which deal specifically with the social aspects of the Church's mission.<sup>186</sup> However, the intimate connection of these two ideas must be born in mind because, for the FABC, promotion of social justice is part and parcel of the Church's evangelising mission,<sup>187</sup> whose mode of action is dialogue with the poor, local cultures, and other religious traditions.<sup>188</sup> We argue that solidarity is just an alternative naming for the FABC's dialogue with the poor,<sup>189</sup> which is anchored in the Trinitarian love and expressed in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. The Church, affirms the FABC, is "called to be a community of dialogue," and "this dialogical model is in fact a new way of being Church."<sup>190</sup>

Firstly, with regard to the theme of dialogue, we note that three developments since the Third Plenary Assembly are notable: a differentiation of types of dialogue, an emphasis on ecumenical dialogue, and a shift from a theocentric view to a spirit-centred dialogue. In the FABC's view, the Church is essentially communication flowing out of the Trinitarian communication and its mission is to continue Jesus

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<sup>185</sup> John Wilkins argues that "for Ratzinger, as an Augustinian, the pastoral constitution was too Thomist, too ready to see grace at work, too hesitant to put the cross at the centre of everything" ("Soldiers or Pilgrims," *The Tablet* [22 November 2003] 10). Wilkins further contends that later, at the 1985 Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1985, "the theology of the cross was reasserted, and 'the signs of the times', which for Pope John XXIII were positive ... were redefined negatively." *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> FABC V, arts. 2.3.3-2.3.4, 3.1.2, 4.2, 6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 278, 280, 282, 283; FABC VI, arts. 3, 14.1-14.2, 15, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2, 7-8, 10; FABC VII, arts. I.A.8, III, *FAPA Vol.3*, 4, 8; BISA V, arts. 6, 12-14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 218-9; BISA VI, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 225; BISA VII, arts. 20-21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 233; OE, "Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation," arts. 17, 29, 22, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 195-6.

<sup>187</sup> BISA IV, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 212; BISA I, arts. 1-2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 199.

<sup>188</sup> FABC V, art. 3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 280; OE, "Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization and Proclamation," art. 51, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 205.

<sup>189</sup> R.M. Unger defines solidarity as "charity moving beyond the circle of intimacy." Quoted by Philip Murnion, "Reflections on the Church and Society: Three Areas of Tension," *Origins* 23:41 (31 March 1994) 725.

<sup>190</sup> BIRA IV/12, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 332.

Christ in word and deed.<sup>191</sup> It is called to a “dialogue of daily life,”<sup>192</sup> a living dialogue with the poor,<sup>193</sup> with other Christian Churches, and with members of other religions and social groups.<sup>194</sup> This dialogue is “the dialogue of heart and soul,”<sup>195</sup> “essentially between persons, not systems.”<sup>196</sup> It is an urgent task, complementary to evangelisation,<sup>197</sup> which must take into account the totality of life and be undertaken at all levels in the Church.<sup>198</sup> This three-dimensional dialogue, social, religious, and cultural, is differentiated into four types: “dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds, dialogue of experts, and dialogue in sharing the experiences of faith,”<sup>199</sup> with dialogue of life being existentially prior to all other types of dialogue.<sup>200</sup> Dialogue of life aims to build societies which are characterised by harmony and mutual esteem; it is described as “an active sharing of life” rather than “a passive tolerance of the other” or a “discussion of differences in dogma or religious practice.”<sup>201</sup> Dialogue of deeds or action is understood as “the formation of basic human communities that work together for the good of all, rather than for one’s own group.”<sup>202</sup> Dialogue of experts or discourse is undertaken by a limited number of specialists, aiming to understand and respect the beliefs and practices of others, and in the process, becoming “more aware

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<sup>191</sup> OSC, “Communication Challenges in Asia,” *FAPA Vol. 2*, 185-6; OSC, “Church and Public Relations,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 185.

<sup>192</sup> OEIA, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 166.

<sup>193</sup> BISA VI, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 225.

<sup>194</sup> FABC IV, art. 3.1.11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 181; see also FABC VII, art. Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

<sup>195</sup> OESC, “Dialogue Between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human and Social Development,” art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 25.

<sup>196</sup> OEIA, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 168.

<sup>197</sup> BIRA III, art. 4, 6, 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120; OEIA, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 167.

<sup>198</sup> BIRA IV/2, art. 8.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 253.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> BIRA V/5, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 169.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*; OEIA, “Harmony among Believers of Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims Southeast Asia,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 174.

<sup>202</sup> BIRA V/5, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 169; OESC, “Dialogue Between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human and Social Development,” art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 25; OEIA, “Harmony among Believers of Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims Southeast Asia,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 174.

and appreciative of the uniqueness of one's own faith."<sup>203</sup> Finally, the dialogue in sharing the experiences of faith, considered to be the most difficult as it requires a high degree of trust, seeks mutual enrichment by challenging and transforming those who engage in it.<sup>204</sup>

Emphasis on ecumenism is the second notable development of the FABC's concept of dialogue.<sup>205</sup> In 1994 the FABC and the Christian Conference of Asia, the two largest Christian bodies in the continent, established the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU) with the aim "to promote unity at the local, national and continental levels" among Christians in Asia."<sup>206</sup> Two years later, representatives of this movement met for the first time to discuss the theme "Theology of Ecumenism" aiming to better understand each other, share their view on being Christian in the Asian context, and explore pathways to "a full communion and partnership in mission."<sup>207</sup> At this meeting they jointly declared that ecumenical endeavour is not only about activities and programs; "it is a way of being church."<sup>208</sup> They went further in their third meeting in 2001 stating that to be Church is "to enter into relationship with other Churches," because "communion is at the heart of the ecclesial reality," and the Church's quest for unity is inseparable from its mission.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> BIRA V/5, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 169.

<sup>204</sup> BIRA V/5, art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 169. It is worthwhile to mention here the three principles for interreligious dialogue proposed by Joseph Ratzinger: "the question of what constitutes the truth in an ultimate sense must not be renounced but rather entered into more deeply"; "those in dialogue...must be prepared to be critical of their own tradition of religious faith in order to purify it"; "from a Christian point of view mission and dialogue should be 'mutually interpenetrative'." Quoted by Barbara Wood and Andrew Unsworth, "Pope Benedict XVI, Interreligious Dialogue and Islam," *One in Christ* 41:4 (2006) 91.

<sup>205</sup> Peter C. Phan notes that "in the Catholic Churches of Asia, ecumenical dialogue has taken the second place, with the primary emphasis given to interreligious dialogue. Happily, in recent years, collaboration between the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has been taking place." See "Reception of Vatican II in Asia," *FABC Papers No. 117* [Part III, Section G, no pagination], <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-117.htm> (accessed 31 October 2006).

<sup>206</sup> OEIA, "Third Seminar Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU III)," arts. 1.2-1.3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 151.

<sup>207</sup> OEIA, "Third Seminar Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU III)," arts. 1.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 151; "First Seminar Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU I)," art. 1.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 147.

<sup>208</sup> OEIA, "First Seminar Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU I)," art. 2.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 148.

<sup>209</sup> OEIA, "Third Seminar Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU III)," art. 2.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 152. Here the FABC concurs with an astute observation by Walter Kasper: "*communio* is the key

The third development of the FABC's concept of dialogue relates to "a shift from a theocentric view to a spirit-centred dialogue which stresses that the Spirit works in all peoples."<sup>210</sup> This dialogue flows from the nature of the Church, a community journeying with peoples of other faiths towards the eschatological kingdom.<sup>211</sup> The FABC also emphasises the need for a dialogue between religion and society that aims to present an alternative vision of a new social order and way of life based on various religious traditions.<sup>212</sup>

Secondly, since the Third Plenary Assembly (1982) the FABC has increasingly stressed that the Church in Asia must be in solidarity with the poor in their struggles for social justice and self-empowerment,<sup>213</sup> by adopting a preferential option for the poor and becoming truly the Church of the poor.<sup>214</sup> At their Fourth Plenary Assembly in 1986 the FABC encouraged all Asian Churches to be committed to Jesus the Liberator, to work for the liberation of Asia, and to become truly Asian Churches, rooted in the peoples of Asia and in solidarity with them.<sup>215</sup> This theme re-emerged at the Fifth Plenary Assembly in 1990, which renewed the call for local Churches to be with the peoples among whom they lived, to respond to their needs, and to bear witness to the values of the kingdom "through presence, solidarity, sharing and

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concept for all bilateral and multilateral dialogues" between various Christian Churches and communities who all define "the visible unity of all Christians as *communio*-unity, and agree in understanding it, by analogy with the original Trinitarian model (LG 4; UR 2), not as uniformity but as unity in diversity and diversity in unity." See *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns and Oates, 2004) 50. However, the FABC appears to pay more attention to the "already" or "today" aspect, rather than the "not yet" or "eschatological" dimension, of ecumenism. Their focus is different from Yves Congar who situates his theology of "ecumenism in an eschatological perspective." See Gabriel Flynn, "Cardinal Congar's Ecumenism: An 'Ecumenical Ethics' for Reconciliation?" *Louvain Studies* 28:4 (2003) 312.

<sup>210</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 2.2.11, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274.

<sup>211</sup> BIRA IV/4, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 300.

<sup>212</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 2.2.11, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274.

<sup>213</sup> BISA V, arts. 12-14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 219; BISA VI, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 225; BISA VI, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 223; BISA I, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 199.

<sup>214</sup> BISA V, arts. 6, 12-14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 218-9; BISA VI, art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 225; BISA VII, arts. 20-21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 233; FABC V, arts. 2.3.3-2.3.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 278; FABC VI, arts. 3, 14.2, 15, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2, 8, 10; FABC VII, arts. I.A.8, III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4, 8; BIMA 1, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 94.

<sup>215</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

word.”<sup>216</sup> Five years later, at the Sixth Plenary Assembly in 1995, the Asian bishops unpacked the implications of the foregoing vision by clarifying that local Christian communities must follow Jesus’ example and live in communion and intimacy with the Triune God, because only through this solidarity with the Trinity can they share God’s love and life with others more credibly and realise God’s kingdom more effectively.<sup>217</sup> Such communities have to be in communion and solidarity with people seeking and struggling for life, and to work with all Asians to liberate societies from whatever oppresses or degrades human life and creation.<sup>218</sup>

The statements of the Bishops’ Institute for Social Action (BISA) also show a progression in their understanding of the implications of becoming the Church in solidarity with the poor in Asia.<sup>219</sup> The first three BISA meetings (1974, 1975 twice) sought to interpret the social dimension of the Gospel in the context of Asia, whereas the next three (held in 1978, 1979, and 1983) emphasised the need for the bishops to act collegially to promote human development. At the seventh BISA gathering in 1986 they endeavoured to discover “a liberative spirituality for social action among the poor and by the poor,” a spirituality that stresses salvation for the whole person and places the Church at the service of all people.<sup>220</sup> It derives from their recognition that poverty and Asian religiosity are the interwoven elements of the Asian ethos that give Asia its specific character.<sup>221</sup> Aloysius Pieris also underscores the conjunction of these two realities, and the intrinsic interconnection between liberation and interreligious dialogue, a double process through which the Asian Church establishes its identity.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> FABC V, art. 3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 280.

<sup>217</sup> FABC VI, art. 14.1, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 7.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8.

<sup>219</sup> BISA VII, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 229.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 4-5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 230; BISA III, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 208.

<sup>221</sup> BISA I, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 199; BISA VII, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 230.

<sup>222</sup> Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).



In short, by paying more attention to the image of the Church as a community of dialogue and solidarity, the FABC highlights the fact that dialogue and solidarity belong to the nature of the Church. Together, these motifs shape and clarify the identity and mission of the Church as a community of Jesus' disciples in Asia.<sup>223</sup>

### 6.4.3 Church as Disciple-Community

Indeed, the third focus in the development in the FABC's ecclesiology is its emphasis on the notion of Church as disciple-community,<sup>224</sup> a motif that was explored as the main theme of the 1995 Sixth Plenary Assembly: "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life."<sup>225</sup> Discipleship, declared the FABC, "is a new paradigm for understanding the Church."<sup>226</sup> This concept of discipleship is premised on the intertwined ideas of Trinitarian communion,<sup>227</sup> fellowship with other believers, solidarity with all peoples, mission as service to life, and "mission as sacrament of peace and harmony."<sup>228</sup> First, communion and solidarity are explicitly linked because service to life demands "communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life, in the way of Jesus' solidarity with humanity."<sup>229</sup> Second, communion and harmony are also connected because communion in the Holy Trinity

<sup>223</sup> OE, "Consultation on 'Evangelization and Inculturation'," *FAPA Vol. 3*, 215.

<sup>224</sup> TAC, "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life," art. 52, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 227.

<sup>225</sup> FABC VI, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 1-12. Kathleen A. Cahalan observes that "disciple is clearly the most prevalent term to identify followers of Jesus; it is mentioned 260 times in the gospels and Acts." "Toward a Fundamental Theology of Ministry," *Worship* 80:2 (March 2006) 112. For Cahalan, "Jesus' teaching on discipleship reveals that disciples are followers, worshippers, witnesses, forgivers, neighbours, prophets, and stewards"; and, "the biblical meaning of disciple begins with the summons of Jesus, 'Come, and follow me' (Matt 4:19)." *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> TAC, "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life," art. 51, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>227</sup> The FABC's view is amplified by Denis Edwards's assertion that the image of Church as a community of disciples is "a profoundly Trinitarian concept: a community following Jesus, directed towards the saving action of the God of Jesus in our world today, seeking to discern and respond to the presence of the liberating Spirit of God in our historical moment" (*Called To Be Church in Australia: An Approach to the Renewal of Local Churches* [Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1987] 47).

<sup>228</sup> FABC VI, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8; TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," art. 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274.

<sup>229</sup> FABC VI, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8. In English communion and solidarity might seem far apart, with the former meaning a certain oneness in action, in support of each other, and the latter would be more oneness in heart and mind, and unity in spirit. In Polish, Pope John Paul II's native language, communion and solidarity are the same word.

is the source and summit of harmony.<sup>230</sup> As God is “the foundation and the fulfilment” of harmony,<sup>231</sup> the Church is recognised as a community of the disciples of Jesus only when its members witness to their Christian faith and values, love one another, and live in harmony.<sup>232</sup> Indeed, the Church will fulfil its mission as sacrament of harmony insofar as it is “a centrifugal Church,” committed to justice, attentive to the Word of God, and open to the Spirit.<sup>233</sup> In what seems likely to be their intention to link the concept of communion to the *ad intra* dimension of the Church and the notions of peace and harmony to the *ad extra* mission, the Asian bishops affirm that “as the sacrament of unity of all humankind,” the Church promotes “communion within the Church, and peace and harmony in the world.”<sup>234</sup> For the bishops, harmony is “the fruit of dialogue,”<sup>235</sup> and “embodies the realities of order, well-being, justice and love as seen in human interaction.”<sup>236</sup> As a concept it can draw on four Scriptural models of “Creation, Covenant, People of God,” and especially ‘Kingdom of God’ which encompasses the first three.<sup>237</sup>

While the Asian bishops already called for an in-depth study of the theology of harmony in the Asian context in 1984,<sup>238</sup> only in 1995 did they develop the initial

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<sup>230</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 4.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 281.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 5.1.1.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 288.

<sup>232</sup> OEIA, “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 166; TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274.

<sup>233</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” arts. 5.2.4, 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 294, 274.

<sup>234</sup> FABC V, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 286.

<sup>235</sup> BIRA IV/12, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 333.

<sup>236</sup> BIRA IV/10, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 313. It is worth noting the difference and similarity between the FABC’s understanding and the view expressed by Hu Jintao, the President of China, who thinks that “a harmonious society should have six characteristics: ‘law and democracy; fairness and justice; trust and friendship; full of vigor; order and stability; harmony between human beings and nature’.” See John Zhang, “Who is Christ and What is the Church for the Chinese People and Society,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 44:3 (2007) 281-2, endnote 8. Zhang also notes that in Chinese, *hexie* (harmony) has a deep structural meaning: *he* comprises two words meaning “crops” and “mouth”; *xie* also consists of two terms which signify “words” and “everyone.” Combined together they mean that “when everybody has food to eat and has words to engage in conversations, society will be harmonious.” *Ibid.* The closest Vietnamese equivalent of *hexie* is “hoà hài,” a double Sino-Vietnamese term that means “harmony” and “concord.”

<sup>237</sup> BIRA IV/10, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 314; see also BIRA IV/12, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 333.

<sup>238</sup> BIRA IV/1, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 249.

contours of a theology of harmony,<sup>239</sup> and also “an ecclesiology of harmony” by a triple theological process: first, by reading the ongoing conflicts and growing disharmony in Asian societies as signs of the times, and taking stock of the various attempts at promoting harmony<sup>240</sup>; second, by reflecting on the meaning of harmony in Asian cultures, philosophies, and religions as well as in the Bible and Church traditions<sup>241</sup>; third, by rereading the Gospels to discover “a Cosmic Christology of harmony,” and crafting a theology and spirituality of harmony as the basis for an active commitment to harmony and rationale for Asian collaboration.<sup>242</sup> From this contextual approach and “the vision of Christ as the sacrament of new harmony”<sup>243</sup> the FABC proposed the metaphor of the Church as the “Sacrament of Harmony” or the Church as “the Servant-Sacrament of Harmony.”<sup>244</sup> These ecclesial images originate from two Vatican II’s ecclesiological models: the Church as the sacrament of unity, which is based on the Trinitarian unity and communion, and the Church as “servant of the Kingdom.”<sup>245</sup> We note that these ecclesiological metaphors, a clear example of the contextual character of the FABC’s theology, are already implied in the bishops’ basic understanding of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, as communion-in-mission, and as community of discipleship.

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<sup>239</sup> Asian and expatriate theologians have also discussed the importance of a theology of harmony for the Church in Asia. For Georg Evers, the concept of harmony is central for understanding the mission of local Churches. See “Christianity and Harmony: From the Past to the Present,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 29:4 (1992) 348-64. Felix Wilfred went further arguing that “theology of harmony is not one more theology, but that it entails a radical change in our theologizing in Asia” (“Towards a Theology of Harmony: Some Fundamental Reflections,” in *Jahrbuch für Kontextuelle Theologien* 1993 [Aachen: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1993] 157); see also Rui De Menezes, “Global Harmony in the Bible,” *Vidyajyoti* 67:11 (November 2003) 895-910; Jacob Kavunkal, “Mission of Harmony and Complementarity,” *Vidyajyoti* 67:11 (November 2003) 937-47; Jacob Parappally, “Challenges of a Theology of Harmony,” *Vidyajyoti* 67:11 (November 2003) 926-36.

<sup>240</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” arts. 1-2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 233-255.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., arts. 3-4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 255-286.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., arts. 5.2.4, 5.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 294, 291-5.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 5.2.5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 294.

<sup>244</sup> It is of note that the heading of section 3.3.3.1 is “The Church as Communion: Sacrament of Harmony.” TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” *FAPA Vol. 3*, 273; see also art. 5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 295.

<sup>245</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 295.

In 1997, the FABC went further to emphasise the importance of the Church as a Spirit-filled community of equals,<sup>246</sup> stressing that Asian Christians and their leadership have the burden of responsibility to work towards an ecclesial fellowship of equals. One of the FABC's central ecclesiological concerns over many years has been the move towards a participative Church, where all members are active subjects, and institutional structures are the means to support the many ministries of the Church.<sup>247</sup> Therefore, Asian Churches need to embrace an authentic spirituality to strengthen their relationship as members of the community of Jesus, so that they can be "the salt, leaven and light for the transformation of the world."<sup>248</sup> All this is a prerequisite for the creation of true and authentic ecclesial communities in Asia, based on the basic equality of all Church members and on the recognition of the plurality of charisms and functions.<sup>249</sup>

#### **6.4.4 Basic Ecclesial Communities as a New Way of Being Church in Asia**

Right from the 1977 Colloquium concern for more vital local communities has been a starting point for the FABC's reflection on ministries in the Church. However, only in subsequent years have the bishops increasingly stressed the need for a new way of being Church,<sup>250</sup> which they defined as "a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia."<sup>251</sup> This new way of being Church, realised in basic ecclesial communities,<sup>252</sup> has four guiding principles. First, the Church in Asia

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<sup>246</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 5.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 324.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> OHD, "Ecumenical Consultation on Social Advocacy Towards a Culture of Peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," art. 2.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 59.

<sup>249</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 5.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 324.

<sup>250</sup> FABC V, art. 8.0, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287.

<sup>251</sup> FABC V, art. 9.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288; see also FABC III, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60. It is worthwhile to recall that in Greek the word "disciple" (mathētēs) means "one who learns." Therefore, in following, the disciples "learn from the master what the Good News of the kingdom would mean." See Barbara E. Bowe, "Tracking Jesus' Footprints. Disciples: Those Who Learn, Who Fail, and Who Follow," *The Bible Today* 46:2 (March-April 2008) 75.

<sup>252</sup> OHD, "Walking Humbly, Acting Justly, Loving Tenderly in Asia," art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 44. Leonardo Boff identifies five characteristics of base ecclesial communities: an oppressed yet believing people, born from the Word of God, being a new way of being Church, a sign and instrument of

has to be a “*communion of communities*” where members accept each other as sisters and brothers.<sup>253</sup> Secondly, it must be a “*participatory Church*” where the gifts of its members are recognised and used for building up the Church and realising its mission.<sup>254</sup> Thirdly, it has to be “a *witnessing and dialoguing Church*” which witnesses to the Gospel and “reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all.”<sup>255</sup> Finally, it must be a leaven of transformation in the world and serve as a “*prophetic sign*” of the eschatological kingdom of God.<sup>256</sup>

For the FABC, basic ecclesial communities, which must be Christ-centred and socially involved,<sup>257</sup> look for new ways of living a life committed to the betterment of society and peaceful living together.<sup>258</sup> They are instruments of awareness and implementation of the Church’s social teachings,<sup>259</sup> which are based on the three fundamental principles: the centrality of the human person, the promotion of human rights, and the primacy of the common good.<sup>260</sup> These basic ecclesial communities enable Churches in Asia to become servant communities as their formation leads to the formation of basic human communities.<sup>261</sup> They can also be an important catalyst

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liberation, and a celebration of faith and life. See *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 125-30.

<sup>253</sup> FABC V, art. 8.1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287; OSC, “A New Way of Being Church in Asia – Communication Consequences,” art. 1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 158; OL, “The Commitment of the Laity in the Church’s Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings.” *FAPA Vol. 1*, 123.

<sup>254</sup> FABC V, art. 8.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287; OSC, “A New Way of Being Church in Asia – Communication Consequences,” art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 158.

<sup>255</sup> OSC, “A New Way of Being Church in Asia – Communication Consequences,” art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 158 and FABC V, art. 8.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288 respectively; see also, BIRA IV/12, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 332.

<sup>256</sup> FABC V, art. 8.1.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288; OSC, “A New Way of Being Church in Asia – Communication Consequences,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 159.

<sup>257</sup> OL, “Second Southeast Asian Regional Laity Meeting,” art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 90.

<sup>258</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 2.3.10, *FAPA Vol.3*, 277.

<sup>259</sup> OL, “Second Southeast Asian Regional Laity Meeting,” art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 91.

<sup>260</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 2.2.8, *FAPA Vol.3*, 273.

<sup>261</sup> BIRA IV/2, art. 12.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 254.

in interreligious dialogue as they can enter into partnership with groups belonging to other religious traditions.<sup>262</sup>

This renewed and always renewing Church must endeavour to fulfil several requirements.<sup>263</sup> It must be “a community sharing and reflecting charity,” “a Church of the poor,” “a participatory Church” which duly recognises the role of the laity, and “a Church generating and serving life.” It also has to undertake “social and humanitarian services to enrich and empower people,” “be aware of the gifts and charisms of its members and use them for the growth of the Church,” and welcome “new ways of communication in witnessing, catechesis, worship and proclamation.” In this new way of being Church, the Church will become “a Church of Asia,” and not simply “a Church in Asia.”<sup>264</sup> Indeed, at the Seventh Plenary Assembly in 2000, the Asian bishops categorically declared that they “are committed to the emergence of the Asianness of the Church in Asia. This means that the Church has to be an embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially interiority, harmony, a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life.”<sup>265</sup> To achieve this lofty goal, they articulated a vision of a renewed Church in Asia as: “a Church of the poor and a Church of the young”; “a Church indigenous and inculturated”; “a deeply praying community”; “an authentic community of faith”; “a new sense of mission”; “empowerment of men and women”; “active involvement in generating and serving life”; “triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with cultures.”<sup>266</sup>

Planning as Church in Asia in the twenty-first century the FABC reiterates that basic ecclesial communities can offer “an alternative or new way of being Church.”<sup>267</sup> This assertion is based on two observations. First, the vision of communion and solidarity

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<sup>262</sup> BIRA IV/1, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 328.

<sup>263</sup> OSC, “A Renewed Church in Asia: Communicating Love and Service,” art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 172.

<sup>264</sup> BIRA IV/12, arts. 48-51, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 332-3.

<sup>265</sup> FAC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

<sup>266</sup> FAC VII, Part I, A, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 3-4.

<sup>267</sup> OHD, “Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” art. III, 13, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 36.

of the Church is best realised at the level of basic ecclesial communities.<sup>268</sup> Second, the contribution of basic ecclesial communities to the building up of the Church in Asia is best seen at this fundamental level.<sup>269</sup> This model of the Church as basic ecclesial communities is inextricably tied to other views of the Church that the Asian bishops have developed such as a community of faith in Asia, a community-in-mission, a community of dialogue and solidarity, and a community of disciples.<sup>270</sup> The development of these theological understandings, together with an emphasis on the evangelising mission of the Church as building up the kingdom of God, as triple dialogue, and as promotion of social justice, with a clear *ad mundum* orientation, shows that their ecclesiology is closely aligned with the six areas of focus in the ecclesiology of Vatican II identified earlier by Monika K. Hellwig. It also exhibits a rich diversity and dynamics in their ecclesiology, which seeks to interpret the identity and role of the Church in its relationship to the world of Asia, the place characterised by pluralism and social fragmentation, where the Asian Church is called to build up the kingdom of God. These characteristics demonstrate that the FABC's ecclesiology is fundamentally a contextual and prophetic theology, a living force for change, not just some dry academic subject. This ecclesiology in turn validates the mission of the laity in Asia, one that is—as previously discussed in Chapter 4—Christ-centred, kingdom-focused, world-oriented, dialogical, and liberative. In deed, for the Asian bishops, the Church, understood primarily as a community of faith in Asia, is essentially a community of Christian life in Asia. All these understandings of the Church in Asia, best understood in a conceptual frame of change and responsiveness, will now be summarised in an architectural model to highlight their interaction and interdependence.

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> It is interesting to compare these ecclesiological understandings with three models of the Church proposed by German Martinez from a social perspective: “the traditional church of Pius X (defensive and reactionary),” “the liberal church under Pius XII (renewal and adaptation),” and “the prophetic church of John XXIII (social doctrine enriched by biblical themes of covenant, Christian freedom and a critique of political and social institutions). From this prophetic model Latin America developed a model of the church that began with the poor and base communities.” See “An Ecclesiology of Peace,” *Theology Digest* 38:3 (Fall 1991) 238-9.

#### 6.4.5 Architectural Summary of the FABC's Ecclesiological Development

The graphical summary presented here consists of three concentric circles highlighting the FABC's models of the Church from 1970 to 2001. The first, innermost circle emphasises the centrality of the FABC's view of the vocation of the Church as a community of faith in Asia. In all the documents of the FABC, no other definition of the Church is as fundamental as this one; it is to this community of faith in Asia that all other images of the Church refer, and it is this communion in faith that distinguishes the Church from all other communities in the Asian continent. The third, outermost concentric band summarises the Asian bishops' vision for the mission of the Church. For them, evangelisation is the primary task and the highest priority for the Church,<sup>271</sup> whose purpose is to build up the kingdom of God.<sup>272</sup> Its mission is directed to the world,<sup>273</sup> and its mode "a triple dialogue of life" with the cultures, the religions, and the poor,<sup>274</sup> with a focus on the promotion of social justice.<sup>275</sup> The second, middle band highlights four main models of the Church that the FABC gradually formulated from 1983 to 2001. These ecclesiological models, which germinated from the basic ideas already existing at or prior to the Third Plenary Assembly in 1982, are not distinct from each other but represent different aspects of the vocation and mission of the Church that the FABC emphasised in response to the needs and situations of Asian Churches. They were developed from the primary, fundamental view of the nature of the Church as presented in the innermost circle, and the vision of the Church's mission and ministry as shown in the outermost band. The arrows used in the outermost band are not meant to indicate any cause-effect

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<sup>271</sup> FABC I, arts. 8, 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13, 16; FABC III, art. 17.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60; FABC V, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279-81; FABC VII, art. III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8; BIMA IV, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

<sup>272</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193; FABC V, arts. 1.7, 2.3.9, 4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275, 279, 282; BIRA IV/2, arts. 8.1-8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 252; BILA III, art. 12.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 245.

<sup>273</sup> FABC III, art. 17.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60; FABC V, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279-81; FABC VII, art. III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8; BILA III, art. 13.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 245.

<sup>274</sup> FABC I, arts. 12-24, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14-6; FABC III, art. 17.1, 17.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60-1; FABC V, arts. 4.1-4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282; FABC VI, arts. 3, 15, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2, 10; FABC VII, art. I.A.8, III. *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4, 8. We coined the term "triple dialogue of life" to better reflect the FABC's view of the triple dialogue and their emphasis on the dialogue of life. These two concepts are often employed in the same train of thought in their statements; see BIMA I, arts. 5, 9-12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 94-5; BISA VI, art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 225.

<sup>275</sup> FABC I, arts. 21-23, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 15-16; FABC V, art. 2.3.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279; FABC VI, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8; FABC VII, art. III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.



relationship between each of these four aspects, but highlight the dynamics and interplay between the various ecclesiological models (in the middle band) and the major aspects of the mission of Asian Churches (in the outermost band).

### Vocation and Mission of the Church: an Ecclesiological Architecture

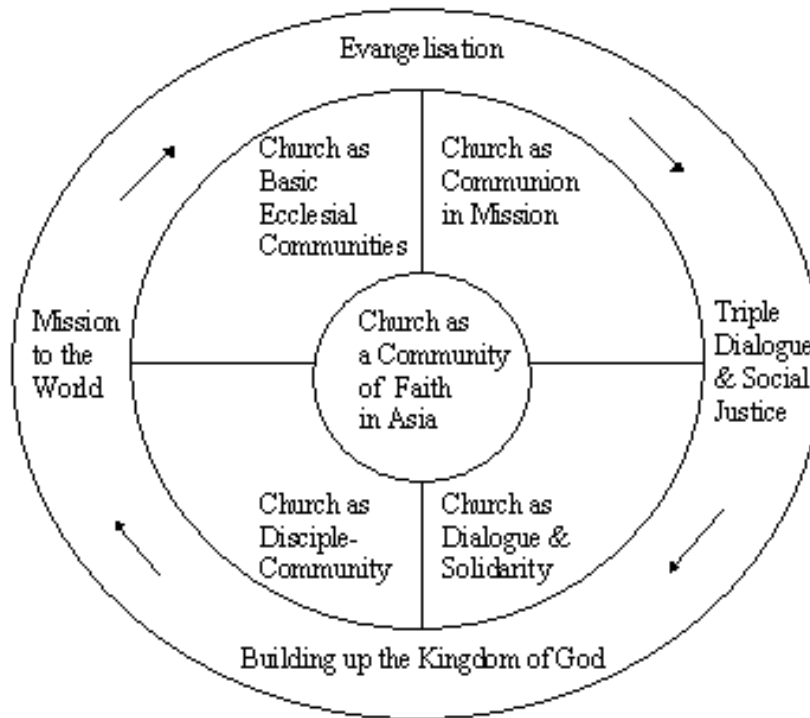


Figure 1

This theological architecture provides a graphical summary of the development of the FABC's ecclesiology since the Third Plenary Assembly when the Asian bishops summarised their understanding of the Church as a community of faith in Asia. By the description of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, the Asian bishops have adroitly combined a sociological category and a theological construct to express the vertical and horizontal, divine and human aspects of the Church. However, the bishops have decisively moved forward, and developed other ecclesiological images and metaphors in response to the pastoral needs of particular times and places.<sup>276</sup> Our

<sup>276</sup> There is little doubt the Asian bishops were encouraged by *Lumen Gentium* (no.6), which states that "the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in various images." In this thesis, we use the terms ecclesial images and ecclesial metaphors interchangeably even though there might be a subtle difference between them. For Paul Avis, "a metaphor is much more than an image.... In metaphors we

observation is that by proposing these forms of ecclesiality, or new ways being Church, the FABC has implicitly adopted an analogical rather than dichotomous (either/or) approach.<sup>277</sup> We also argue that this approach, which is primarily contextual, theologically consistent, and pastorally faithful to the vision of Vatican II,<sup>278</sup> seems to proceed in the opposite direction from that followed by Avery Dulles who started with an exploration of the richness of the reality of the Church under five ecclesiological models,<sup>279</sup> and subsequently, developed an encompassing model of the Church as a community of disciples.<sup>280</sup> A clear advantage of the Asian bishops'

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envisage one thing in terms of another, bringing two images into juxtaposition." Quoted by Brian F. Flanagan, "The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors in Systematic Ecclesiology," *Horizons* 35:1 (2008) 34-5; see also Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 94-8.

<sup>277</sup> For T. Howland Sanks, "the Church is and always has been an analogical notion, that the various ways in which the Church has taken on historical concreteness have been conditioned by historical particularities and therefore were partly alike and partly different—analogous rather than univocal" ("Forms of Ecclesiality: The Analogical Church," *Theological Studies* 49 [1988] 696); see also David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981).

<sup>278</sup> Archbishop Denis E. Hurley argues that the greatest achievement of the council is "its vision of the church—what the church is and what it must be in the world" ("The Struggle of Vatican II," *Church* 17:1 [Spring 2001] 24). He adds that "the key to that vision was the presence of the Holy Spirit in the people, in individuals and communities, and the living out of that reality in terms of the culture in which we find ourselves, and the needs of that culture and the needs of that society." Ibid. For Joseph A. Komonchak, "the reason for a variety of images [of the Church] is to be found in the council's choice of a more biblical, patristic, and liturgical language" ("The Significance of Vatican II for Ecclesiology," in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 76).

<sup>279</sup> In his highly acclaimed book *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976), Avery Dulles identified five models of the Church, as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant. For a detailed discussion of this classic work see Thomas A. Baima, "Models of the Church and Its Contribution to Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," *Chicago Studies* 47:2 (Summer 2008) 173-89.

<sup>280</sup> Following the lead of John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* (no. 21), Avery Dulles refines, and in some way integrates, these five ecclesiological images into a new model of the Church as a community of disciples. See John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (Melbourne: A.C.T.S. Publications, 1979) 47; Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad: 1982) 7-14. For Dulles, these models are all included in the discipleship model, "comprehensively understood." Ibid., 18. However, he is quick to point out that the concept of the Church as a community of disciples "is only one perspective on the Church," and "other images and models, such as servant, sacrament, mystical body, and institution, are needed to remind us that the Church is an organic and juridically organized community established by the Lord and animated by his Spirit. Through reflection on these other models we can continually enrich our understanding of discipleship itself." See "Community of Disciples as a Model of the Church," *Philosophy and Theology* 1:2 (Winter 1986) 118-9. Earlier, Dulles observed that "the Church is too great a mystery to be contained under any one model or conceptual scheme" ("The Church, the Churches, and the Catholic Church," *Theological Studies* 33:2 [June 1972] 234). John Fuellenback notes that the community model of Dulles "came to be known after the council as communion ecclesiology" (*The Kingdom of God: the Message of Jesus Today* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995] 168).

ecclesiological approach is that, like the New Testament ecclesiology,<sup>281</sup> it provides a tensile coexistence of the divergent views of the Church, and can avoid the tension caused by the problematic invocation of their teaching to defend conflicting models of the Church in Asia.<sup>282</sup> It also reminds Asian Christians that no one single model can exhaust the rich reality of the Church,<sup>283</sup> and all frameworks are but weak metaphors trying to catch and reflect the mystery of the Church.<sup>284</sup> Indeed, while no one single image of the Church can encapsulate the full meaning and scope of FABC's ecclesiology, but viewed synoptically these images, which remain open to change, provide an insight into the identity and role of the Asian Churches.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the FABC's ecclesiological interpretations, which were crafted to make the identity and vocation of the Church more intelligible, the preaching more credible, and the social relevance of the evangelising mission clearer. For the Asian bishops, faith is constitutive of the Church, and the Church defined primarily as a community of faith in Asia, one that believes in Jesus, proclaims him to be the Lord, and lives the new life in the Holy Spirit. At its deepest level, the Church is a communion-in-mission, rooted in the life of the Trinity, comprising the entire local community, incarnated in a people, a defined culture, a specific place, and at a

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<sup>281</sup> For T. Howland Sanks, "within the New Testament itself we find a plurality of images and a plurality of self-understandings, which at the same time, maintains communion, *koinōnia*, among the churches. We find both unity and pluralism in ecclesiology even then" (See *Salt, Leaven, and Light: The Community Called Church* [New York: Crossroad, 1992] 51).

<sup>282</sup> The FABC recognises that "within the Church, there are conflicts between different concepts and models of the Church." See BILA V, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 78. The issue of which ecclesiological model is predominant in the teachings of Vatican, namely the Church as the people of God, or the Church as communion, has received considerable attention from theologians, especially since the 1985 Synod of Bishops. We will review this debate in Chapter 8 when we discuss the ecclesiological basis of John Paul II's theology of the laity.

<sup>283</sup> Ian G. Barbour advocates "a *critical realism* that takes religious models seriously but not literally." See *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (London: SCM Press, 1998) 119. For him, models in theology are "neither literal descriptions of reality nor useful fictions, but human constructs that help us interpret experience by imagining what cannot be observed." Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> T. Howland Sanks notes that, according to Paul Minear, "'conservatively estimated, there are more than eighty'," "images and symbols that refer to the community in the New Testament." See *Salt, Leaven, and Light: The Community Called Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 44.

particular time. This mystery of the local Church is realised in the diocese, the parish, basic ecclesial communities, and also Christian families. Therefore, the Church's structures must support its mission by being adapted to the local context, and based on the principles of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility. The highest priority of the Church's mission is evangelisation, and the aim of evangelisation to build up the kingdom of God. This mission is decidedly oriented to the world, and contextually expressed by a triple dialogue with the religions, the cultures, and the poor of Asia.

From the primary definition of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, the Asian bishops have further explored the vocation and mission of the Church as they critically engage the issues and challenges of the Asian context. For them, the Church is also a disciple-community, a communion-in-mission, a community of dialogue and solidarity, and basic ecclesial communities. The motif of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, amplified by these contextual expressions of the Church, is the Asian bishops' ecclesiological referent and their vision of a new way of being Church in Asia. It shows both a fundamental continuity and a gradual development in the FABC's ecclesiology, which in turn has a direct bearing on the identity and role that the FABC has envisioned for the Asian laity. In this ecclesiology, lay people are the principal agents of the redemptive mission of the Church in the world of Asia. Chapter 7 will evaluate this ecclesiology as the underlying framework of the FABC's theology of the laity.

## CHAPTER 7

### EVALUATION OF THE FABC'S ECCLESIOLOGY (1970-2001)

#### 7.1 Introduction

There is no doubt that the role of the laity in carrying out the mission of the Church has been one of the most significant themes in the documents of the FABC. For the Asian bishops, lay people *qua* Asian Christians are as integral to the Church as the clergy. Hence, the source of their vision for lay responsibility can be found in their understanding of the life, nature, and purpose of the Church.<sup>1</sup> At the Third Plenary Assembly in 1982 the Asian bishops discussed “the Church as a community realizing its communion and mission in its own being and life, and in relation to other communities.”<sup>2</sup> Four years later, at the Fourth Plenary Assembly, they reflected on the vocation and mission of lay people in the Church and in the world of Asia.<sup>3</sup> For them, the laity must continue “to share zealously in the mission of the Church as a leaven in the world and as a sign of the Reign of God.”<sup>4</sup> In this chapter we will investigate the ecclesiological underpinnings of the FABC's theology of the laity and argue that there was a concurrent development between its theology of the laity and its ecclesiology from 1970 to 2001, and that both of these theologies are essentially contextual and relational. We will also suggest that the Asian bishops have developed their initial conception of the Church as a community of faith in Asia into a matrix of theological models, according to which the Church is called to become a community of faith, hope, and love in Asia, realised in basic ecclesial communities.

In this chapter we will first discuss the Christological, pneumatological, and Trinitarian foundation of the FABC's ecclesiology. We will then investigate its

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Bouyer remarks that “to rediscover the true significance, the true role of the laity, it must be studied in the concrete life of the Church, where the laity are articulated with the apostolic ministry. The place where they meet, in the word's fundamental sense, is the ‘parish’, the local church.” See *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982) 408.

<sup>2</sup> FABC III, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

<sup>3</sup> FABC IV, art. 2.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

<sup>4</sup> FABC IV, art. 2.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

overtly “from below” and “from within” methodology by examining the Asian bishops’ emphasis on ecclesiological categories such as local Church, basic ecclesial communities, and Church as communion-in-mission, as well as its sacramental dimension and regnocentric focus. Finally, we will attempt to assess the strengths and limitations of the FABC’s ecclesiology. We will note that the FABC’s theology of the laity is grounded in a contextual and relational ecclesiology. This ecclesiology promotes a new way of being Church as in basic ecclesial communities, which are rooted in the life of the Trinity, and defined by the following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia, living and acting under the guidance and power of the Spirit. The FABC’s ecclesiology is contextual because it is both Christological and pneumatological, characterised by a faithfulness to the living presence of Jesus Christ as the embodiment of the Gospel and tradition, and an attentiveness to the signs of the times discerned as the movements and promptings of the Holy Spirit in the ever-changing cultural and social realities of Asia.<sup>5</sup> It is also relational as it is essentially Trinitarian, drawing on and sustained from the very communion and mission of the Triune God. While communion and mission are the structural principles for understanding the Asian bishops’ ecclesiology, they are not in tension with other concepts used to articulate their vision of the Church. Indeed, as a preferred ecclesiological model, the FABC’s conception of the Church as communion-in-mission integrates both communion ecclesiology and mission ecclesiology, the two major and distinct options for contemporary ecclesiology.

## 7.2 Theological Foundation of the FABC’s Ecclesiology

Modern Catholic theologians tend to develop their ecclesiology from one of three perspectives: Christological, Pneumatological or Trinitarian.<sup>6</sup> In a groundbreaking work on ministry, Kenan Osborne champions a vigorous Christological orientation,

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<sup>5</sup> FABC V, art. 7.1, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 284; Stephen B. Bevans places his proposed five models of contextual theologies between a conservative pole of “gospel message, tradition” and a radical pole of “culture, social change” (*Models of Contextual Theologies* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992] 27).

<sup>6</sup> Louis Bouyer contends that the ecclesiology of Vatican II is “strongly Christological” and gives “no place to the Spirit, despite a few preliminary statements in the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*” (*The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982] 172).

predicting that “Christology in an ever increasing way will be seen as the basis and substance of ecclesiology.”<sup>7</sup> For him, Gospel discipleship, the common matrix of all Christians, is the best point of departure on the issue of the lay person,<sup>8</sup> the foundation for ministry, and the criterion for determining the development of the structure of the Church.<sup>9</sup> J.-M.R. Tillard, on the contrary, develops his ecclesiology based on the concept of communion,<sup>10</sup> and gives great attention to the guiding role of the Holy Spirit in the Church.<sup>11</sup> In his view, “the structure of the Church is justified only by its relationship and service to the action of the Spirit, whether it is a question of sacraments, of ministry or of canonical regulation.”<sup>12</sup> Tillard further contends that “the church is called upon to live both her own experience of God’s grace and her mission in the ‘memory’ of what God has accomplished in Christ. Through the ages the Holy Spirit leads and keeps her in this ‘memory’ .... The Spirit thus gives the church its ‘memory’.”<sup>13</sup> Focusing on the two poles of the Christian faith, “belief in the oneness of the Three Divine Persons and belief in the incarnation of the Second Person ... for the salvation of the world,”<sup>14</sup> George Tavard accentuates the importance of the Trinity in understanding the Church, a theme he discusses at length in the first three chapters of his treatise of the Church.<sup>15</sup> Here Tavard echoes the view of Hans Küng who emphasises three metaphors of the Church as “the people of God,

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<sup>7</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 603, 607.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 603, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 598-600.

<sup>10</sup> J.-M.R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 29, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 52, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>13</sup> J.M.R. Tillard, “The Apostolic Foundations of Christian Ministry,” *Worship* 63:4 (1989) 290.

<sup>14</sup> George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 244. Here Tavard seems to follow the lead of Yves Congar who considers the doctrine of the incarnation “as the key to the whole mystery of the Church.” See Gabriel Flynn, “Incarnation, Ecumenism and Ecclesiology in the Thought of Cardinal Yves Congar and Bishop B.C. Butler,” *Louvain Studies* 31 (2006) 197; see also Yves Congar, *Chrétiens désunis: principes d’un ‘oecuménisme’ catholique*, Unam Sanctam, no. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1937) 344.

<sup>15</sup> George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 29-76.

the body of Christ, and the creation of the Spirit.”<sup>16</sup> Küng calls these images “the fundamental structure of the Church.”<sup>17</sup> Tavad contends that this fundamental basis of the Church gives rise to a tradition from which the main structures of the Church and its life were born.<sup>18</sup> In this section we will argue that the FABC’s ecclesiology embraces all three Christological, pneumatological, and Trinitarian dimensions, and while holding them in balance, it offers a contextual vision for the Church in Asia as a matrix of communion-in-mission, dialogue and solidarity, and disciple-community realised in basic ecclesial communities. As such this ecclesiological understanding is deliberately contextual and relational.

Indeed, in the texts of the FABC, which discuss its vision for the new way of being Church in Asia, there are three underlying motifs: Gospel discipleship, the Spirit of Jesus, and the Trinity. In these overlapping strands of thought one can distinguish those which are broadly Christological from those which are pneumatological and Trinitarian. The statement issued by the FABC’s Theological Advisory Commission on “Being Church in Asia” for instance, has a clearly Christological focus and tone. It stresses that the context of Asia requires a deeper awareness of the meaning of the Church as a communion of communions, and a new way of being Church that can present a new face of Christ to Asian society.<sup>19</sup> The human portrait of Jesus, it says, attracts the peoples of Asia, especially those who suffer or are marginalised.<sup>20</sup> Human images of Jesus that have special appeal or powerfully resonate with Asian people include “born of woman, God-made-poor, God-with-us, our peace, teacher and prophet, healer, a person of harmony, suffering servant-leader, liberator, life-giver,” and reconciliation.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the Church must assume a truly human face and endeavours to be “the sacrament, the sign and the instrument, of the communion with

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<sup>16</sup> Hans Küng, *The Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967) vii-viii, 107-260.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>18</sup> George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 245.

<sup>19</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” art. 24, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 221.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, arts. 36, 40, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 224.

<sup>21</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” arts. 36, 41, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 224-5.



God and with humanity that Jesus brings.”<sup>22</sup> As Christ is the sacrament of the new harmony, the Church must become its servant-sacrament by embracing the values of love, truth, justice, and the dignity of human person.<sup>23</sup> Because the face of Jesus attracts the Asian people in and through the face of his Church, the Church in Asia, as a community of the disciples of Jesus, has to present to Asia “the face of a confessing, serving, discerning and contemplating Church.”<sup>24</sup> Other statements of the FABC also highlight the need for the Church to be “Christ-centered” and “socially involved.”<sup>25</sup> As communion-in-mission the Church must also evangelise herself by following the life and ministry of Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

The Asian bishops further emphasise the Christological basis of their ecclesiology by encouraging Asian theologians to develop a cosmic Christology of harmony by rediscovering and articulating the Church’s faith in Jesus “as the One sent by the Father to reconcile, restore and recapitulate the whole universe.”<sup>27</sup> Such a Christology will engender a cosmic ecclesiology that moves beyond its institutional attention “to understand the Church essentially as a centrifugal Church, open to the whole universe and present in and for the universe.”<sup>28</sup> This vision will also refocus the Church’s

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., arts. 40-41, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 224-5. Here the FABC seems to retrieve *Lumen Gentium* (no.1) which teaches that “the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.”

<sup>23</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 295.

<sup>24</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” arts. 37-38, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 224. Adolfo Nicolás observes that “the Church in Asia has been poor often, persecuted in many places and for long periods of time, powerless and almost invisible in not a few places ... To their credit, many bishops and other religious figures in Asia, have been happy with this humble being of the Church. This is the image of the Church of Christ that makes most sense in Asia; a Church at home in the poverty of the masses and the never discriminating hospitality of hope.” See “Christianity in Crisis.” Asia. Which Asia? Which Christianity? Which Crisis?” *Concilium* 3 (2005) 69.

<sup>25</sup> In a statement on lay people issued in 1999, the FABC highlighted “the need to be a Church that is Christ-centered,” and the challenge to “build and maintain small communities that are Christ-centered and socially involved.” See OL, “Second Southeast Asian Regional Laity Meeting,” arts. 7-8, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> OE, “Consultation on Evangelization and Communication: Orientations and Recommendations,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 210.

<sup>27</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 5.2.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 294.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

concerns for religious, cultural, social, and political realities from an ecclesiological emphasis to a truly theocentric focus.<sup>29</sup>

Our analysis above shows that the FABC's ecclesiology is firmly based on Christology, that is, the function and mission of the Church follows from the function and mission of Jesus. In this Christological and soteriological ecclesiology the Church is the locus of salvation for it bears witness to the reconciling love of God in Christ. Its aim is to work for the kingdom of God, for peace, justice, and harmony, and for a better Church and a better society. Therefore it is also an incarnate ecclesiology, a theology of the Church in the world of Asia.

However, in spite of this strong Christological anchoring,<sup>30</sup> the FABC's ecclesiology retains its pneumatological dimension as it espouses the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the Church as community of believers filled with the living Spirit.<sup>31</sup> In accord with Vatican II, which provides its wider context and point of departure,<sup>32</sup> this pneumatological ecclesiology articulates several principles. First, the Spirit is the Church's life principle. The Church, defined by a faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the Paschal mystery of Jesus, must be "a Spirit-filled community of equals,"<sup>33</sup> and a community for others, which endeavours "to live and act under the constant guidance and by the power of the Spirit."<sup>34</sup> Second, the Spirit has a critical

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Bruno Forte observes that "the prevailing view of the Church in Catholic theology before Vatican II was characterised by what Yves Congar called 'Christomonism'. This expression indicates the special attention given to the Christological aspects of the Church and, hence to her visible and institutional dimension" (*The Church: Icon of the Trinity: A Brief Study*, translated by Robert Paolucci [Boston, Mass.: St. Paul Books & Media, 1991] 12).

<sup>31</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4, summarises the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and describes the universal Church as "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." According to Mary Cecily Bouding, further analysis elsewhere of this Doctrinal Constitution shows that "there are more than twenty activities mentioned which are distinct and characteristic in themselves." See "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Documents of Vatican II," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 51:4 (1985) 259. Bouding estimates that "spontaneous mention of the role of the Holy Spirit occurs about eighty times in *Lumen Gentium*, and about a hundred and eighty times in the other documents" of the Second Vatican Council. Ibid., 255.

<sup>32</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," arts. 4.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 305.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., art. 5.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 324.

<sup>34</sup> FABC III, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60.

function, helping the Church distinguish and evaluate the signs of the times to reach the reality of the social and cultural phenomena. The Church must continually seek the guidance of the Spirit in interpreting and assessing the signs of the times in Asia in light of the Gospel.<sup>35</sup> Third, this ecclesiology considers as very important and relevant to the Asian context the conciliar teaching on the ecclesial elements outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. This teaching, we suggest, lies at the heart of the FABC's vision for interreligious dialogue, which flows from the nature of the Church, a community journeying with adherents of other faiths toward the kingdom of God.<sup>36</sup> It has also been invoked time and again in many documents of the FABC.<sup>37</sup> The framework of this ecclesiology, which acknowledges the presence and working of the Spirit in the world, in other religions, cultures, ideologies, etc, would enable local Churches to relate the Spirit with the mystery of kingdom of God, and consequently interpret their experiences in the Asian context of plurality of cultures and religions.<sup>38</sup> In his magisterial trilogy whose titles reflect the FABC's triple dialogue, Peter C. Phan repeatedly emphasises this message by explicating John Paul II's inspiring declaration on the subject.<sup>39</sup> Fourth, an important reason for the FABC to foster a pneumatological ecclesiology is charism. The Church does not live by its hierarchical structure alone but by the variety of its charisms and ministries, which are bestowed by the Spirit for the general good and edification of the Church.<sup>40</sup> In this

<sup>35</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.2.2.7, 4.3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 309, 311.

<sup>36</sup> BIRA IV/4, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 300.

<sup>37</sup> FABC III, art. 8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 57; BIRA II, art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 115; BIRA IV/2, art. 8.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 253; BIRA IV/3, arts. 2, 6, 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 258-60; BIRA IV/7, arts. 12-13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 310; BIRA IV/12, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 326; OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 3.10.2.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 299.

<sup>38</sup> OTC, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology," art. 3.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 364; OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," arts. 4.2, 5.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 305-9, 318; FABC I, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II's statement is found in "Redemptoris Missio," art. 28, *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 549. See Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003) 42; 118; *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) footnote 6, xxiii, 238; see also Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64:3 (September 2003) footnote 13, 500. Phan's third book in this trilogy is entitled *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> ACCM, art. 31, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 73; BIRA IV/3, art. 9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 260; OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," arts. 4.2.1.1, 4.3.1.2, 4.3.2.1, 5.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 306, 311, 314, 324. The FABC's understanding of the role of hierarchy in the Church is aligned with the original meaning of the term

ecclesiology both charisms and institutions are essential to the Church.<sup>41</sup> Fifth, the anointing of all members of the Church by the Spirit means that they are called to bear a prophetic witness to the kingdom of God, to the Church as mystery, to a communion of faith, and to a single but multiform mission of the Church,<sup>42</sup> with the Spirit as the principal agent of mission.<sup>43</sup> Sixth, the spiritual substance of communion explicates what it means to belong to the Church: full communion in the Church requires communion in the Spirit.<sup>44</sup> Two principal moments in the life of the Christian community serve to manifest and deepen the gift of communion bestowed by the Spirit: baptism which inaugurates the believers into the Church's communion, and the Eucharist which most fully expresses the communion that is the Church.<sup>45</sup> Through

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"hierarchical" highlighted by Walter Kasper, who states that it means of "'holy origin', i.e., she has to be understood on the basis of what is holy, by the gifts of salvation, by word and sacrament as authoritative signs and the means of the Holy Spirit's effectiveness." *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns and Oates, 2004) 54. For Joseph Ratzinger, the Church's "deep and permanent structure is not *democratic* but *sacramental*, consequently *hierarchical*. For the hierarchy based on the apostolic succession is the indispensable condition to arrive at the strength, the reality of the sacrament." See *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, translated by Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985) 49. Ratzinger goes on to assert that "what the Church needs in order to respond to the needs of man [*sic*] in every age is holiness, not management." *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>41</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," arts. 5.6, 5.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 323, 324.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 4.3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 311; FABC VI, art. 14.5, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> OE, "Asian-Born Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life (AMSAL)," art. 2.d, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 206.

<sup>44</sup> ACMC, art. 23, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 72; FABC III, art. 7.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> FABC III, arts. 7.5, 11.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 59. The FABC's view is strikingly similar to those expressed by Walter Kasper who states that "the sacramental basis of *communio* is the *communio* in the one baptism," and "the summit of *communio* is participation in the eucharist" (*That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* [London: Burns and Oates, 2004] 55). The FABC's linkage between the Church and the Eucharist is also reminiscent of the tradition of the first centuries which links membership of the Church and the Eucharist, a point explicated by J.-M.-R. Tillard in these words: the Eucharist is "the sacramental event by which the church 'that is in such and such a place' expresses its nature: to be a gathering of human diversity in Christ, who reconciles it with the Father and reconciles its members with one another." See *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: A The Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by Madelaine Beaumont (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001) ix. The theological stance of the FABC is also redolent of the Orthodox ecclesiology. Indeed, John D. Zizioulas affirms that "the basic ecclesiological principle applying to the notion of the local Church in the Orthodox tradition is that of the identification of the Church with the eucharistic community. Orthodox ecclesiology is based on the idea that wherever there is the eucharist there is the Church in its fullness as the Body of Christ" (*Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, with a foreword by John Meyendorff [Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985] 247). Joseph Ratzinger reminds us that "the idea of eucharistic ecclesiology was expressed for the first time in Orthodox theology by Russian theologians of the exile, and was contrasted with presumed Roman centralism. Every eucharistic community, it was said, is already wholly church, since it has Christ entirely" ("The Local Church and Universal Church," *Origins* 15:22 [14 November 1985] 372).

the power of the Spirit, local communities are also brought into a communion with God, with each other, and with all peoples.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the FABC's appreciation of mystery of the local Church, basic ecclesial communities, and also human communities is one fruit of their pneumatological ecclesiology. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church is actualised in the local Churches, which are in their own localities the new people called by God, in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit, according to the Asian bishops, "seems to be moving the Church strongly in the direction of small Christian communities."<sup>47</sup> And wherever people come together to build human communities based on love and justice, there is the presence of the Spirit.<sup>48</sup>

This quick survey of the FABC's documents reveals that the pneumatological dimension is an essential and structurally vital element of the FABC's ecclesiology.<sup>49</sup> This ecclesiology stresses that pneumatology is a new orientation for being Church in Asia,<sup>50</sup> and the action of the Spirit of Jesus lies at the centre of the new way of being Church in Asia.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, only through the power of the Spirit can the Church respond to the challenges of Asia, and in the process become truly Churches of the Spirit.<sup>52</sup> It can be argued that the FABC has devoted increasing attention to pneumatology with the publication in 1997, through its Office of Theological Concerns, of a lengthy document entitled: "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today."<sup>53</sup> But amidst this pneumatological discourse, it continues to insist that the mission of the

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<sup>46</sup> TAC, "Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life," arts. 41-42, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 225; OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.2.2.5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 308;

<sup>47</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 313.

<sup>48</sup> BIRA IV/3, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 260.

<sup>49</sup> In this regard, the FABC seems to go a step further than Vatican II, which, according to Louis Bouyer, provides an ecclesiology that is "strongly Christological" and "gives practically no place to the Spirit, despite a few preliminary statements in the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*" (*The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982] 172).

<sup>50</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.2.2.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 309.

<sup>51</sup> FABC V, art. 9.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 288.

<sup>52</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," *FAPA Vol. 3*, 237.

<sup>53</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," *FAPA Vol. 3*, 237-327.

Spirit is inseparable from that of the Father and the Son.<sup>54</sup> The pneumatological function has a constant Trinitarian and Christological reference: the Spirit makes Christians one by incorporating them into the one Body of Christ and leads them to the kingdom of God.<sup>55</sup> This Trinitarian anchoring manifests itself most explicitly in the FABC's reflection on the themes of ecclesial communion and mission.

The Church, according to the FABC, is a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>56</sup> It is essentially "a communication which flows out of the communication of the Trinity."<sup>57</sup> At its deepest level, it is "a communion rooted in the life of the Trinity."<sup>58</sup> It realises its communion and mission in its own being and life, and in relation to other communities in Asia.<sup>59</sup> Anchored in the Trinitarian unity it proclaims itself as effective sign of communion with God and among humankind.<sup>60</sup> Its spirituality is always a response in the Spirit to the call of God which comes to through his Word.<sup>61</sup> These statements underscore the FABC's contextual and relational approach which endeavours to answer not only the question "what is the Church?" but also "why the Church?" Indeed, the aim of the FABC's Third Plenary Assembly was to deepen its understanding of the mystery of the Church in light of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and to discover its meaning for local Churches.<sup>62</sup> Since God is a relationship of love, the Church is called to be a communion of love, a communion rooted in the communion

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<sup>54</sup> BIRA IV/3, art. 10-11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 260. Karl Rahner suggests that the Holy Spirit is the "cause efficiente," and the Christ the "cause finale" of the Church. See *Traité fondamentale de la foi, Introduction au concept du christianisme*, translated by Gw. Jarczyk (Paris: Centurion, 1983) 355; quoted by Bernard Sesboüé, "Y a-t-il une différence séparatrice entre les ecclésiologies catholique et protestante?" *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 109 (1987) 14.

<sup>55</sup> FABC III, arts. 7.2, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60; BIRA IV/3, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 260.

<sup>56</sup> FABC III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

<sup>57</sup> OSC, "Communication Challenges in Asia," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 185-6; OSC, "Church and Public Relations," *FAPA Vol. 3*, 185.

<sup>58</sup> FABC III, art. 7.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56.

<sup>59</sup> FABC III, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

<sup>60</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," art. 5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 295.

<sup>61</sup> BIRA IV/12, art. 36, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 331.

<sup>62</sup> FABC III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

of God's Trinitarian life.<sup>63</sup> It is made possible in Jesus Christ through the power and bond of the Holy Spirit.<sup>64</sup> It refers first to the fellowship with God, and is simultaneously a fellowship with others.<sup>65</sup> The scope of the gift of communion is not limited to the Church, or even to all humanity; rather it extends to the whole of creation.<sup>66</sup> Hence, it is a foretaste of the fullness of communion that is kingdom of God, which has already broken into human history.<sup>67</sup>

The FABC's treatment of the concept of mission is also loaded with Trinitarian insights. In its view, the Church as a sacrament of unity and a servant of the kingdom in Asia needs to rediscover its role, and in the Spirit becomes a Church in mission, more deeply incorporated in Jesus and in constant journey to the eternal Kingdom of God."<sup>68</sup> The commission of Jesus to make disciples of all peoples and to baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is the call to build up the human community in harmony based on the Trinitarian communion.<sup>69</sup> The mission of the Church, affirms the FABC, is the *missio Dei*,<sup>70</sup> hence the very mission of the Trinity.

The Christological, pneumatological, and Trinitarian foundation of the FABC's ecclesiology discussed above, we argue, provides the theological underpinnings for its theology of mission as triple dialogue. First, modelled after the *kenosis* of Jesus who privileges the poor, the Church must adopt and show a preferential solidarity with the

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<sup>63</sup> Jean Rigal notes that, for Yves Congar, "since God's life is trinitarian, the church is fundamentally *ecclesia de trinitate*." See "Toward an Ecclesiology of Communion," *Theology Digest* 47:2 (Summer 2000) 117.

<sup>64</sup> BIRA IV/12, art. 36, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 331.

<sup>65</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," arts. 3.3.3.1, 5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274, 295; BIRA III, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120.

<sup>66</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," arts. 3.3.3.1, 3.3.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274-5.

<sup>67</sup> See FABC VI, art. 14.1, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 7-8; BIRA IV/10, art. 8.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 252; BIRA IV/10, arts. 6-8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 314.

<sup>68</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.2.2.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 309; TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," art. 5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 295.

<sup>69</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," art. 3.3.3.3, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 275-6.

<sup>70</sup> OE, "Consultation on Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad Gentes*: A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia," art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 222.

poor and the marginalised.<sup>71</sup> Second, interreligious dialogue, the Asian bishops stated categorically, is the work of the Spirit.<sup>72</sup> Third, the Church as communion and sacrament of harmony,<sup>73</sup> which is anchored in the Trinity and the kingdom of God, can offer a message of communion and harmony that is consonant with the cultures and religious traditions of Asia.<sup>74</sup> The love of the Trinity which the FABC describes as the self-giving of God to mankind, is at the heart of all service to life.<sup>75</sup>

This threefold theological foundation, which is strengthened by an anthropological conception of the Church, manifested by the primary definition of the Church as a community of faith, also underlines the contextual and relational character of the FABC's ecclesiology. The Christological and pneumatological basis highlights the contextual nature of the FABC's ecclesiology, a theology that emphasises the human face of Jesus and the reading of the signs of the times discerned as promptings and movements of the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian dimension, on the other hand, underscores its relational character by stressing the theme of the Church as communion or community of faith rooted in the perfect communion of the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This contextual and relational character in turn provides a framework for understanding the main characteristics of the FABC's ecclesiology, such as its predominantly "from below" and "from within" methodology,<sup>76</sup> an accentuation on local Church and basic ecclesial communities, a symbiosis of communion and mission as the double finality of the Church, and finally, a focus on the sacramental and regnocentric dimension.

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<sup>71</sup> FABC VI, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8; OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.2.2.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 308; BIRA IV/12, art. 38, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 331.

<sup>72</sup> BIRA IV/7, art. 38, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 310.

<sup>73</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," art. 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 273.

<sup>74</sup> BIRA IV/10, arts. 6-8, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 314; BIRA IV/4, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 300; FABC VI, art. 14.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 7-8.

<sup>75</sup> FABC VI, art. 14.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 9.

<sup>76</sup> It goes without saying that the phrases "from below" and "from within" are slippery and problematic theological concepts. Here we employ them to refer mainly to the FABC's ecclesiological approach and point of departure, and in no way infer that the Asian bishops ignore the theological principles and teaching of Vatican II that inform their ecclesiology in a more fundamental way.



### 7.3 Theological Approach of the FABC's Ecclesiology

The first feature of the FABC's contextual ecclesiology is its overtly "from below" and "from within" methodology, which comprises an inside analysis of the realities of Asia, a reflection of faith, and a plan for action. This methodology reflects a turn to human experience and a reliance on sociological analysis while acknowledging the intrinsic presence and working of God in the very development of human history and society.<sup>77</sup> It has three intertwined elements, namely sociological, Christological, and pneumatological. It begins mainly from below and from within, in the faith experiences of local communities, and springs from the Asian bishops' acute awareness of the challenges of Asian societies. It is based on a Christology which is not separated from soteriology, a theme reinforced in the statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly which highlights the role of the Church as the servant and instrument of the liberation of Asia.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, it can also be called a liberation ecclesiology,<sup>79</sup> which is fundamentally contextual and historical.<sup>80</sup> It is anchored in a pneumatology that is also developed from below, a theological endeavour that the FABC hopes will "not be a separate, isolated area of the theology, but a leaven which

<sup>77</sup> For a helpful discussion of this ecclesiological methodology see Roger Haight, "Ecclesiology From Below: Genesis of the Church," *Theology Digest* 48:4 (Winter 2001) 319-28.

<sup>78</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.1.1, 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 191.

<sup>79</sup> J. Bryan Hehir contends that "while it reflects *Gaudium et spes* in its starting point of an experiential assessment of 'the signs of the times' and its strong ecclesial focus, the theology of liberation has moved in directions that go substantially beyond the conciliar reflection" ("Church-State and Church-World: The Ecclesiological Implications," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 41 [1986] 63). We argue that this remark, made in connection with Latin America, also holds true for the Asian theology of liberation, including that proposed by the FABC. It is also worthwhile to recall Deane William Ferm's observation that "liberation theology has two major components. First, it stresses liberation from all forms of human oppression: social, economic, political, racial, sexual, environmental, religious and so on"; second, "its insistence that theology emerge from the local setting and basic Christian communities." See "Third World Liberation Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 51:4 (1985) 309.

<sup>80</sup> Camil Menard asserts that Latin American ecclesiology is "contextuelle et historique." See "L'ecclésiologie des théologiens de la libération: Contexte général and analyse de quelques questions ecclésiologiques discutées par Leonardo Boff," *Eglise et Théologie* 19 (1988) 349. Jürgen Moltmann notes that "the 'location' of liberation theology—its *locus theologicus*—was the misery of the poor." See "Political Theology in Germany after Auschwitz," in *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester*, edited by William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton (London: T & Clark, 2004) 40. Moltmann goes on to observe that "liberation theology in its narrower sense has now become embedded in a wider 'theology of life,'" and "what has developed are the principles of every contextual theology: context, *kairos*, community." *Ibid.*, 41.

will permeate all of the presently emerging Asian theologies.”<sup>81</sup> Theology, it affirms, must be at the service of life,<sup>82</sup> and becomes “part of the process of becoming and being Church in Asia.”<sup>83</sup> It is not merely a faith seeking understanding, but a “faith seeking life, love, justice and freedom.”<sup>84</sup> It proceeds from below and from within, “from the underside of history, from the perspective of those who struggle for life, love, justice, and freedom.”<sup>85</sup> Consequently, the Church must create its human structures from below depending on the demands of the time and in harmony with culture of the people.<sup>86</sup> This overtly from below and from within ecclesiology in turn accentuates the communion of local Churches realised in basic ecclesial communities. It visualises the Church as a communion of local communities and postulates that basic ecclesial communities can be called Church, and are even a new way of being Church, a true expression of the people of God, a Church of the people from below.<sup>87</sup> Underlying this claim is the FABC’s view that the mystery of the local Church is realised in a variety of ways, levels, and forms.<sup>88</sup> This view raises a couple of issues that warrant further consideration.

The first issue centres on the question of the chronological and ontological priority of universal Church or local Church.<sup>89</sup> In their statements the Asian bishops do not explicitly assign an ontological priority to either of them, even though they tend to

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<sup>81</sup> BIRA IV/3, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 259; OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.2.2.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 307.

<sup>82</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 1.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 232.

<sup>83</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” art. 49, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 58, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 228.

<sup>87</sup> José Comblin argues that “the rediscovery of a fundamental biblical teaching that had long been hidden, at least since the fourteenth century” shows that “the church is the people of the poor” (*People of God*, edited and translated by Phillip Berryman [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004] 43). In this book, Comblin argues that Vatican II’s retrieval of the Church as the people of God needs to be reclaimed, and he goes on to aver that “without Vatican II’s theology of the people of God, there would be no liberation theology.” *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>88</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 4.3.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 312.

<sup>89</sup> It is noteworthy that, prior to Vatican II, Catholic theologians paid little attention to the theology of local Church. See D.E. Lanne, “L’Eglise locale et l’Eglise universelle,” *Irénikon* 43 (1970) 481.

lean toward the side of local Church. Instead, they establish what constitutes the Church and distinguish it from other human communities by defining the Church primarily as “a community of faith in Asia.” While the usage of the term “in Asia” reflects the FABC’s emphasis on the human factors of the local Church, which is actualised and incarnate in a specific cultural, historical, political, and social context, we note that, for the bishops, the constitutive principles of the Church remain the call of God, the Gospel of Christ, the presence and working of the Spirit, the centrality of the Eucharist, and the apostolic mission and ministry of a bishop. These constitutive principles are invoked to define the reality of the Church as a communion of communities.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, for the bishops, communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility are the ecclesiological guidelines for the renewal of ecclesial structures.<sup>91</sup>

The second issue relates to the terms “basic” and “ecclesial,” the theological categories that, in the FABC’s widened understanding, include the rich and the poor, clergy and laity.<sup>92</sup> This semantic expansion is connected to the bishops’ consistent emphasis over the years on the preferential option for, and solidarity with, the poor, and the introduction of the new term basic “human” communities. Indeed, wherever the phrase “basic human communities” occurs, it tends to be used either in relation to the promotion of the dialogue of life,<sup>93</sup> or to a commitment to a betterment of society and peaceful co-existence.<sup>94</sup> Self-reliant basic Christian communities, says the FABC, should lead to the formation of basic human communities, because in this way they

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<sup>90</sup> At the Fifth Plenary Assembly, the FABC declares that “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.” FABC V, art. 8.1.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 287. For Louis Bouyer, *communion/koinonia* constitutes the essence of the Church, which, “understood in its full context, is the *communion of communions*, appearing as a *communion* of local Churches” (*The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982] 29).

<sup>91</sup> See FABC IV, art. 4.5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>92</sup> Margaret Hebblethwaite enumerates several key features of base communities: “base community is the basic cell of the Church”; “base community is about the basics of Christianity”; “base community is about the base of society—the poor”; “base community is about the base of the Church—the laity.” See *Base Communities: An Introduction* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993) v-vii. Hebblethwaite also observes that “within Latin America, basic ecclesial communities and liberation theology have grown up side by side, the one supporting the other.” *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>93</sup> OEIA, “Fourth Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs (FIRA IV),” art. 21, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 145.

<sup>94</sup> OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” art. 2.3.10, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 276.

can become truly servant Churches.<sup>95</sup> The FABC also emphasises the need for a visible linkage of these basic communities to the institutional Church by their preference in the use of “ecclesial” rather than “Christian” in later statements.

Theological orientation of “basic ecclesial communities” is the second notable feature of the FABC’s ecclesiology. In these communities, members are motivated by love and see things from the perspective of the poor. They articulate Christian mission as a preferential, but not exclusive, option for the poor, a clear reference to a basic theme of liberation theology.<sup>96</sup> The study of the word of God and its application to daily life play a central role in these communities, which are often involved in social and political activities. The pastoral process of basic ecclesial communities is explained by Archbishop Orlando Quevedo of the Philippines, who observe that these basic communities generally adopt a “spiral” method of discernment, an analysis of the situation followed by a reflection in light of faith, decision-making, and planning for implementation.<sup>97</sup> This process concludes with action and evaluation, and starts again when another situation emerges.<sup>98</sup> In these communities lay people are empowered to play a leading role after some organisation, and the clergy remains in the supporting role.<sup>99</sup> These communities, especially basic human communities which spring from basic ecclesial communities, grow by building relationships through intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and by reaching out to others in committed service. Through basic ecclesial communities, a contemporary image of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles—an ecclesiological model that “will always be an

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<sup>95</sup> BIRA IV/2, art. 12.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 254.

<sup>96</sup> T. Howland Sanks notes that “not only was the lived experience of the base communities in dialectical relationship with liberation theology, they arose almost simultaneously.” *Salt, Leaven, and Light: The Community Called Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 173. J. Y. Calvez made a similar remark: “les théologies de la libération ont de plus cherché expressément, quant à leur méthode, à se constituer par la réflexion sur l’expérience, particulièrement de chrétiens et de communautés engagés dans les tâches de libération. Beaucoup de communautés de base, qui se sont développées récemment dans l’Eglise latino-américaine, se caractérisent de cette façon.” See “La ‘théologie de la libération’ critiquée et accueillie: après les deux instructions de la congrégation pour la doctrine de la foi,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 108:6 (1986) 856.

<sup>97</sup> Orlando B. Quevedo, “Seeds of the Kingdom,” *The Tablet* (30 May 1998) 696.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

essential point of reference because the Church will always be ‘apostolic’”<sup>100</sup>—the FABC sees a new way of being Church, and hopes to infuse new life into an ecclesiology that would allow faith to engage culture.<sup>101</sup> Basic ecclesial communities then are instruments for the evangelisation of their members, the larger Church itself, and most importantly, the poor.<sup>102</sup> Their witness and service are also a contribution to nation building. They are a new way of being Church,<sup>103</sup> a realisation *par excellence* of the Church as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Church in the FABC’s theology is “a communion of ecclesial communities participating in the mission and ministry of Jesus.”<sup>104</sup> This symbiosis of communion and mission, explicated as the double finality of the Church, is the third feature of the FABC’s ecclesiology.

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<sup>100</sup> German Martinez, “An Ecclesiology of Peace,” *Theology Digest* 38:3 (Fall 1991) 238; Louis J. Luzbetak also underscores this point arguing that “the building of New Testament Christian communities in our own times is, in fact, one of the most central objectives of mission, if not the very heart of mission, the very key to mission success, and therefore a major and fundamental goal of mission anthropology as well” (*The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 12 [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988] 380-1). For a brief discussion of the distinctive development of the early Christian community, “freed from Judaic laws, and after a few decades, completed by the destruction of Jerusalem and the ending of the temple cult,” see Hans Küng, *The Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967) 109-113.

<sup>101</sup> The FABC’s hope is reminiscent of Leonardo Boff’s remark that “basic communities are generating a new ecclesiology, formulating new concepts in theology” (*Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* [London: Collins, 1986] 2). For Monika Hellwig, “the Christology taught and discussed at major theological schools around the world has been challenged and influenced substantially in the last several decades by voices coming from small grass roots communities.” See “Christologies Emerging from the Small Christian Communities,” in *Christian Communities: Imagining Future Church*, edited by Robert S. Pelton (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) 27. Hellwig notes two theoretical grounds for a theology arising from the Christian base communities: “the primacy of *praxis*,” and “the hermeneutic privilege of the poor.” *Ibid.*, 27-8.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony Bellagamba observes that “the third megatrend affecting the church’s mission is the need for personal encounter with God within the small faith communities” (*Mission and Ministry in the Global Church* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992] 3). He describes other megatrends affecting the Church and its mission as follows: resurgence of cultural tradition, revival of religious experience, problems in ministerial structure, the Western Church in crisis, globalisation, the poor as the new evangelisers, new presence and significance of women, new frontiers for mission, and co-partnership with the earth.” *Ibid.*, 2-9.

<sup>103</sup> For Karl Rahner, “the Church of the future will be built up from small communities.” Quoted Linda Rainsberry and Patrick Treacy, “*Integritas—A Vision of Christian Faith*,” *The Furrow* 55:9 (September 2004) 474.

<sup>104</sup> OE, “Consultation on Evangelization and Communication: Orientations and Recommendations,” art. 1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 209.

To date, theologians have often explored communion and mission as two distinct but interrelated ecclesiological models or frameworks through which the Church can be understood.<sup>105</sup> Like Yves Congar, Jerome Hamer was one of the first Catholic theologians to propose communion as a theological model for understanding the Church.<sup>106</sup> He describes communion as the “permanent form of the unity of the Church.”<sup>107</sup> A great many of other Catholic ecclesiologists would follow in his footsteps to investigate this theme. Notably among this cohort are Dennis Doyle and Jean-Marie Tillard.<sup>108</sup> However, the greatest impetus for the emphasis on the Church as communion comes perhaps from several official documents, including the concluding report of the 1985 Synod of Bishops, which affirms that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council’s documents,”<sup>109</sup> the letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,<sup>110</sup> the statement of the Second

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<sup>105</sup> One of the clearest examples was the two special seminars organised by the Canon Law Society of America to examine the “communion” dimension of the Church, which is documented in the entire issue of *The Jurist* 36 (Winter and Spring 1976), and the “mission” aspect of the Church, reported in *The Jurist* 39 (Winter and Spring 1979).

<sup>106</sup> Yves Congar, *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1970); *Diversity and Communion* (London: SCM Press, 1984).

<sup>107</sup> Jerome Hamer, *The Church is a Communion* (London: G. Chapman, 1964) 209. For R. Marlé, “Dire que l’Eglise est une communion, c’est dire que sa réalité la plus fondamentale n’est pas à chercher au niveau des structures, mais des personnes et de ce lien spirituel qui les unit et qui a nom charité [sic].” See *La singularité chrétienne* (Paris: Casterman, 1970) 147-8; cited by J. Pintard, “L’Eglise locale comme lieu de divinisation,” *Esprit et Vie* 25 (24 June 1971) 392-3.

<sup>108</sup> Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000); J.-M.R. Tillard, *Churches of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992). For Doyle, “communion ecclesiology focuses on relationships in order to understand the Church”; and there are “five basic forms of relationships to which theologians tend to refer: divine, mystical, sacramental, historical, and social.” See “Henri De Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 209.

<sup>109</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” art. II.C.1, *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 448. According to Richard Lennan, “Vatican II employed the language and concepts of ‘communion’, but did so without developing either the definitive presentation of this theology or exploring all of its practical implications.” See “Communion Ecclesiology: Foundations, Critiques, and Affirmations,” *Pacifica* 20:1 (February 2007) 25. Making an insightful remark, Lennan contends that “communion ecclesiology emerges as central only through the process of reception in the decades that follow the Council.” *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>110</sup> This letter declares that the concept of communion is “very suitable for expressing the core of the mystery of the church and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology.” See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Understood as Communion,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 108. It moves on to explain ecclesial communion “as the mystery of the personal union of each human being with the divine Trinity and with the rest of mankind,” a reality that is “at the same time both invisible and visible.” *Ibid.* According to this letter, “ecclesial communion, into which each individual is introduced by faith and by baptism, has its root and center in the holy eucharist.” *Ibid.*

Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission,<sup>111</sup> and the joint statement issued by the International Consultation Between the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance.<sup>112</sup> Literature also abounds on the mission aspect of the Church. One of the most visible interpreters was Pope John Paul II, who declares that “the Church is missionary by her very nature.”<sup>113</sup> We note that in all theological discourse on the Church, and perhaps more so in the documents of the FABC, the concept of communion tends to accentuate the “nature” aspect while mission looks to the “purpose” of the Church.

Indeed, the FABC’s view of the Church as a community of faith in Asia or as a communion of communities is enlightening. It stresses the degree to which Christians are united to God and to one another. It affirms that the Church is constituted first and foremost by a participation in the Trinitarian mystery. This communion embraces diversity and pluralism. This concept is often used interchangeably with other concepts such as fellowship and participation. While people of God, one of the two key concepts of Vatican II ecclesiology,<sup>114</sup> appears rather often in the documents of

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<sup>111</sup> Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, “The Church as Communion: Agreed Statement of by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission,” *Origins* 20:44 (11 April 1991) 719-27; also appeared in *One in Christ* 27:1 (1991) 77-97. For Jean Rigal, “the need for a sound substructure that would be acknowledged by the churches as a whole in ecumenical dialogue is one of many factors that has contributed to the rediscovery of ‘communion’ as the major concept in ecclesiology” (“Toward an Ecclesiology of Communion,” *Theology Digest* 47:2 [Summer 2000] 117).

<sup>112</sup> International Consultation between the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance, “Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of ‘Koinonia’,” *Origins* 33:19 (16 October 2003) 310-20. Analysing the usage of the term *koinonia* in ten major ecumenical documents, Susan Wood notes that there is a mutual acceptance of the invisible elements of *koinonia* as described in the Scriptures. See “Ecclesial *Koinonia* in Ecumenical Dialogues,” *One in Christ* 30:2 (1994) 127. She recalls the following assertions that serve as the theological foundation for this invisible *koinonia*: i. “The Trinity is the interior principle of ecclesial communion”; ii. “The Holy Spirit if the source of *koinonia* or communion”; iii. “Because it is the result of our union (*koinonia*) with God, the Christian community can also be called *koinonia*”; iv. “*Koinonia* refers to the nature of the Church as Body of Christ, People of God, and Temple of the Holy Spirit”; v. “This communion is entered through baptism and nourished and expressed in the celebration of the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:17; Rom 6:4-11; 1 Cor 12:13).” *Ibid.*, 127-8. However, she quickly adds that “the greatest divergence between ecclesial traditions exists at the level” of the visible elements of *koinonia*. *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>113</sup> John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” art. 62, *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 559. It is worth noting that in his first encyclical “*Redemptor Hominis*” (no. 13) John Paul II expressed the finality of the Church in Christological terms: “The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life.” See “*Redemptor Hominis*” (Melbourne: A.C.T.S. Publications, 1979) 23.

<sup>114</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer notes that “Pope Paul VI chose the people-of-God terminology used by the Council to designate the church as a concrete and historical reality, i.e., as an active, changing subject

the FABC,<sup>115</sup> the term itself is used only once in the final statement of the Third Plenary Assembly, which discusses the nature and mission of the Church in Asia, where it is invoked to explicate the mystery of the Church as a people united to the Trinity.<sup>116</sup> We suggest that the concept of communion or community of faith holds a central place in the ecclesiology of the Asian bishops and underpins all other images of the Church.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, to rightly understand their ecclesiology one has always to begin from the title of the Third Plenary Assembly which is also their primary definition of the Church as a community of faith in Asia. In this ecclesiological view, while there are still various functions and ministries, clergy and laity alike have full membership status and participate completely in the mission of Christ. Like the concept of communion, mission is constitutive of the life of the Church and is concerned with the whole of human affairs. It is the responsibility of the whole community who shares in the priestly, prophetic and pastoral mission of Jesus and the Church. As “a disciple-community” in the Asian context the Church must be

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in history” (“The Actualization of Vatican II.” *Theology Digest* 49:2 [Summer 2002] 149). For Pottmeyer, this term also fulfils other functions such as “acknowledging continuity with Israel’s call and brings to expression the salvation-historical status of the church on its way to becoming the fulfilment of the kingdom of God”; emphasising “the priority of God’s grace and actions”; and calling to attention to “the common call and mission of all members of the church and their fundamental relatedness as sisters and brothers in Christ”. Ibid. Joseph Ratzinger argues that to remain loyal to the Second Vatican Council one must “always read together and think together both of these central words of its ecclesiology: sacrament and people of God” (Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” *Origins* 15:22 [14 November 1985] 375); see also *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (Middlegreen, Slough, England: St Paul Publications, 1988) 19. He goes on to suggest five characteristics of the image of the Church as people of God: the historical character of the church, the unity of the history of God with his people, the internal unity of the people of God, the eschatological dynamism, and the ecumenical perspective. Ibid; see also *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (Middlegreen, Slough, England: St Paul Publications, 1988) 17.

<sup>115</sup> BIMA art. BIMA II, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 97; BISA I, art.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 199; BIRA IV/10, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 314; BISA V, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 218.

<sup>116</sup> FABC III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

<sup>117</sup> There is a convergence between the FABC’s view and the ecclesiology of Vatican II as understood by Walter Kasper who argues that “in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, at first glance other images and concepts seem to predominate in the description of the Church: the Church as People of God, as Body of Christ, as Temple of the Holy Spirit and as Sacrament, i.e. a sign and instrument of unity. A detailed analysis, however, reveals that these images and concepts are ultimately based on, and interpreted through, the understanding of the Church as *communio*” (*That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* [London: Burns and Oates, 2004] 58). Paul McPartlan also remarks that “the ecclesiology of communion is not particularly evident in the documents of the Vatican II at first sight” (“Showing What God is Like.” *Priests and People* [August-September 2003] 316).



missionary.<sup>118</sup> As “a communion-in-mission” the Church must also evangelise herself by the life and ministry of Jesus.<sup>119</sup>

By coining the term “communion-in-mission” the Asian bishops have adopted an approach that is “both/and” rather than “either/or.” This approach emphasises both communion and mission as fundamental dimensions of the Church. In doing so, they not only reflect closely the teachings of the Second Vatican Council but also integrate papal and synodal teachings such as those of Pope Paul VI and the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops.<sup>120</sup> This Synod makes an implicit link between the two concepts of communion and mission in its affirmation that “the Church as communion is a sacrament for the salvation in the world.”<sup>121</sup> The Asian bishops do not envisage mission as the sole purpose of the Church. Nor do they present communion as relative to mission or vice versa. In fact, they do not separate the nature and the mission of the Church, but consider both communion and mission are the one *raison d’être* of the Church. This ecclesiological view has two positive aspects. First, the symbiosis of these notions avoids the weaknesses identified by Louis J. Luzbetak as associated with the “Church as community” model, such as it “may lead people to become too introspective and not concerned enough about the world outside the Church-community,” or “to forget the Kingdom for which the Church exists,” or “to forget that the Church *is* mission.”<sup>122</sup> Second, it could be aligned

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<sup>118</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” arts. 51, 25, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 227, 222.

<sup>119</sup> OE, “Consultation on Evangelization and Communication: Orientations and Recommendations,” art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 210.

<sup>120</sup> Vatican II, “*Ad Gentes*. Degree on the Church’s Missionary Activity,” in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new. rev. ed., (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 813-56; Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new. rev. ed., (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 427-32; Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 444-50.

<sup>121</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” art. II.D.1, *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 449.

<sup>122</sup> Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 12 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988) 377. Susan Wood also warns that while communion ecclesiology “is rooted in the Pauline image of the Church as the body of Christ,” it “can not simply be a return to a naïve identification of between Church and Christ.” See “Ecclesial *Koinonia* in Ecumenical Dialogues,” *One in Christ* 30:2 (1994) 129.

with the two distinct approaches to ecclesiology identified by Neil Ormerod: the Platonic approach and the Aristotelian (realist) approach.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the FABC's "communion-in-mission" model could fit into what Ormerod calls the Platonic approach in the sense that it could be used as a theological symbol for the operation of the Church in Asia today. This model also contains elements of what Ormerod refers to as the Aristotelian (realist) approach in the sense that the communion framework is one that traces its origins to the early Church from which the Asian Church can draw historical lessons for today. Third, the twin concept of communion-in-mission is intimately tied to the sacramental and regnocentric dimension of the Church, the fourth notable feature of the FABC's ecclesiology.

For the Asian bishops, "the Church is at its deepest level a communion rooted in the life of the Trinity,"<sup>124</sup> and a sacrament of "the loving self-communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope and love."<sup>125</sup> As "the

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<sup>123</sup> For Neil Ormerod, the Aristotelian (realist) approach "takes as its starting point the historical data of the Church, a Church of historically constituted communities which develop and change over time. It will then seek to draw historical lessons for the current life of the Church, often by reflecting on some golden age, perhaps the communities of the New Testament, the patristic era, or the high Middle Ages." On the contrary, the Platonic approach usually takes "as its starting point a highly charged theological symbol of the Church, such as the Church as the body of Christ, the people of God or a divine communion. It will then seek to draw conclusions from these religious symbols for the concrete operation of the Church we all live in." See "Recent Ecclesiology," *Pacifica* 21:1 (February 2008) 58. Neil Ormerod has passionately argued for the need to develop a systematic ecclesiology that is "empirical, critical, normative, dialectical and practical" (Neil Ormerod, "Recent Ecclesiology," *Pacifica* 21:1 [February 2008] 65, 58); "The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 63:1 (2002) 3-30.

<sup>124</sup> FABC III, arts. 7.1, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60. Here one might detect an indirect influence of Augustin whose "ecclesiology is linked with his understanding of Trinity: as the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, so the Spirit is the bond of love between believers, and thus the unity of the Church is a reflection of and a participation in the unity of the Triune God." See Eric Plumer, "The Development of Ecclesiology: Early Church to the Reformation," in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 30. Unlike Augustin, Thomas Aquinas' ecclesiology "follows from his teaching on grace. It is the grace of the Spirit that summons people to believe and unites them in faith in the Mystical Body, the Church." *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>125</sup> FABC III, art. 7.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56. By stressing the graced response of humanity to God's offer of saving grace—which is "nothing else than the self-communication of God"—the FABC, to quote James O'Connell, seems to imply that "the Church in its essence is a society of conscience." See respectively, Edward J. Kilmartin, "Sacraments as Liturgy of the Church," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 545; James O'Connell, "The Future of the Church: Where Can We Go? [part 1]," *The Month* (June 1998) 222. O'Connell clarifies his definition stating that the Church "depends on those who freely follow Christ (discipleship), who are willing to bear witness in truth, worship and integrity (prophecy), and who form a distinctive community (body of Christ)." *Ibid.*

sacrament of God's message in the world,"<sup>126</sup> it continues the mission of Christ. It is worth noting that the term "sign and instrument of salvation," an inspiring image of the Church proposed by Vatican II,<sup>127</sup> seems to occur only once in the documents of the FABC.<sup>128</sup> This reticence may be due to the fact that, in Asia, a sustained emphasis on the Church as a sacrament of universal salvation might cause misgivings among followers of other soteriological religions. However, in a clear reference to the ecclesial mark of catholicity or diversity/pluralism,<sup>129</sup> the bishops of Asia stress that Church must endeavour to be a sacrament of unity and harmony of all peoples,<sup>130</sup> because it is the sign and instrument of reconciliation in Christ through the presence and working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>131</sup> For the FABC, the local Church must also be "a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist."<sup>132</sup> We suggest that by emphasising that the Church is rooted in the sacramental mystery of the Trinity and centred on the Eucharist, the FABC has recovered "the biblical and patristic vision of Church" as "the community of persons incorporated into Christ through the Eucharist,"<sup>133</sup> and presented an image

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<sup>126</sup> BIRA II, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 115. Here the FABC develops further a theological theme that became prominent just prior to the Second Vatican Council, namely, the Church as sacrament. See Joseph Comblin, "La théologie catholique depuis la fin du pontificat de Pie XII," in *Bilan de la Théologie du XX<sup>e</sup>*, vol. 1, 1. *Le monde du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*; 2. *La théologie chrétienne: les grands courants*, edited by Robert Vander Gucht and Herbert Vorgrimler (Paris: Casterman, 1970) 485.

<sup>127</sup> For instance, *Lumen Gentium* no. 48 and *Ad Gentes* no. 1.

<sup>128</sup> OE and OHD, "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach Towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia (ASIPA)," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 108.

<sup>129</sup> In response to the three perceived challenges of globalisation—homogenisation (erosion of local cultures and imposition of some dominant culture), heterogenisation (causing polarisation, division, and cultural fragmentation), and deterritorialisation (a process that unbinds culture from geographical space)—Vincent J. Miller suggests three dimensions of catholicity as breath or fullness, harmony or communion of difference, and depth (engagement in the particular and the local). See "Where is the Church? Globalization and Catholicity," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 412-32.

<sup>130</sup> FABC III, arts. 3.6, 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55, 59.

<sup>131</sup> See FABC III, arts. 7.2, 7.4, 7.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56.

<sup>132</sup> FABC III, arts. 7.5, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60.

<sup>133</sup> Bernard P. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 230. Prusak also observes that "during the second to the fifth centuries, the key words applied to Church were 'service' (*diakonia* or *ministerium*) and 'communion' (*koinōnia*). The term 'Church' denoted a participatory community of all the baptized." Ibid., 266. In his second volume on the ecclesiology of communion, J.-M.-R. Tillard observes that "when East and West were still united, Augustine was probably, among the Fathers of the church, the one who most explicitly and most profoundly expressed the link between the Eucharist (the summit of Christian initiation) and the church." *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: A The Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*,

of the Church that it is not only mystical or sacramental, but also visible, concrete, and this-worldly. The FABC's ecclesiological view also coheres with the teaching of Vatican II which stresses the foundational role of the Eucharist.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, like the Council, the FABC has emphasised the communal dimensions of the local Church retrieved from the first millennium while holding on the hierarchical perspectives from the second millennium.<sup>135</sup> The local community of faith in Asia, says the FABC, "constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father."<sup>136</sup>

In the ecclesiology of the FABC, the notion of kingdom of God is a complex reality which has four preponderant ideas. First, there is an eschatological view in which the kingdom of God is seen to be beyond history. The Church, as a pilgrim among the Asian peoples in pilgrimage to God's eternal kingdom, will learn appropriate ways of being Church in mission through the Spirit, and becoming ever more profoundly incorporated in Jesus Christ.<sup>137</sup> The Holy Spirit, the bishops declare, dwells in the Church as in a temple, prays in the Church, bears witness, guides, and leads it to perfect union in the future kingdom.<sup>138</sup> Second, we find an understanding of the kingdom of God which involves an *already* and a *not yet*.<sup>139</sup> The kingdom, as God's

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translated by Madelaine Beaumont (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001) 39. The Church, according to St. Augustine, becomes "the locus of the *agapē* of God. This *agapē* is accomplished in a communion between Christ as head and his members." Ibid., 54. For an engaging and expanded discussion of the underlying unity of love of God, self, and neighbour see Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993).

<sup>134</sup> For instance, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* nos. 41-2; see also 7, 10, 26.

<sup>135</sup> For Bernard P. Prusak, *Lumen gentium* is a compromise document which recovered and presented an ecclesiology of communion "alongside, and in tension with, the pyramidal hierarchical paradigm that had developed during the Church's second millennium." *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 301-2.

<sup>136</sup> FABC III, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60.

<sup>137</sup> OE, "Consultation on Evangelization and Communication: Orientations and Recommendations," art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 210; OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.2.2.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 309.

<sup>138</sup> OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 5.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 318.

<sup>139</sup> Jon Sobrino remarks that "after his resurrection, Jesus was confessed by the church as the Christ; the theme of kingdom of God, which had dominated the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, receded. ... Resurrection primarily evokes eschatological fulfilment, while kingdom of God points to actualization of the final reality now. See "The Kingdom of God in Contemporary Spirituality." *Theology Digest* 32:3 (Fall 1985) 327.

gift and initiative, “is already begun and is continually being realized, and made present through the Spirit.”<sup>140</sup> Third, there is a prophetic view that sees God’s kingdom as norms for individual and political morality. Because “Jesus served the Reign of God primarily through prophetic counter-witness,” the Church has to follow in his footsteps, and through proclamation, lifestyle and presence, exposes the false values and the dehumanising effects in the Asia of today.<sup>141</sup> Finally, the Asian bishops speak of the Church as the humble servant of the kingdom, and highlight the need for it to be truly missionary, because Jesus expended his whole life for the kingdom of God.<sup>142</sup> By emphasising repeatedly that the Church exists for the kingdom of God, they have promoted, according to Peter C. Phan, “a different ecclesiology, one that decenters the Church in the sense that it makes the center of the Christian life and worship not the Church but the reign of God.”<sup>143</sup> Indeed, for the FABC, as a community of disciples, the Church in Asia is called to live in faithfulness to the Gospel and to engage in the works of the triple dialogue, which are a contribution to the civilisation of love, a first sketch of the vision of the kingdom of God on earth. In this sense the FABC’s ecclesiology touches Christian life in its deepest spiritual recesses as well as its day-to-day secular realities, because it is Christologically centred, pneumatologically conceived, and rooted in the Trinity. Its approach is decidedly and predominantly from below and from within, characterised by an accentuation on local Church and basic ecclesial communities, a symbiosis of communion and mission as the twin finality of the Church, and a focus on the sacramental and regnocentric dimension. We will now turn to assess the strengths and limitations of this rich ecclesiology.

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<sup>140</sup> BIRA IV/2, arts. 8.1-8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 252.

<sup>141</sup> TAC, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” art. 45, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 225.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 44, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 225.

<sup>143</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 237.

#### 7.4 Strengths and Limitations of the FABC's Ecclesiology

Like their overall theology, the contextual ecclesiology of the Asian bishops is developed from the concrete, existential, and historical situations of Asia, a theology that constantly wrestles with issues relating to the place and function of the Church in Asian societies. This ecclesiology encompasses the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* by rooting the genesis of the Church in the relationship with the Trinity, and the insights of *Gaudium et Spes* by affirming the historical perspective of the Church in the world. Indeed, the question the bishops ask is not only what the Church is, but also who and where the Church is for the people, especially the poor in Asia, a continent populated by different cultures and religions. Their ecclesiological approach is overtly from below and from within, and their theological methodology is deliberately contextual with an accentuation on social concerns.<sup>144</sup> Contextuality and relationality then are two of the most notable strengths of their ecclesiology.

Indeed, theologising from the crucibles of history and from the perspective of local communities, especially the poor, has been one of the hallmarks of the Asian bishops' ecclesiology. That their ecclesiology is contextual can be seen from their faithfulness to the teaching of Vatican II and their primary description of the Church as a community of faith in Asia. This contextual character is also discernible in their model of the Church as a communion-in-mission, their creative linkage between mission and dialogue, and communion and solidarity, and their deeper reflection on discipleship as a new paradigm for understanding the Church. All these ecclesiological appellations are contextual in the sense that they do not merely express the *immanent* nature of the Church but more importantly its *economic* mission, not only what the Church is, but also who and what it is for in the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*.

First, the theme of communion-in-mission, one of the FABC's richest expressions of the Church, combines the inward-looking perspective of the Church as a communion in the Trinity with the soteriological, outward-looking focus on the Church as mission

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<sup>144</sup> For the FABC, "the context determines the Church's mission," an important principle of the new way of being Church. See OESC, "A Renewed Catechesis for Asia: Towards the Year 2000 and beyond," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 31.

to the world. It points beyond the communion in God's own life to the participation in the mission of God, realised in the world of Asia. Communion is the criterion of what the Church is supposed to be, and mission what it is intended to do. The model of the Church as communion-in-mission also integrates two of the Second Vatican Council's dominant images: the Church as communion and the Church as people of God. It affirms that the Church is both a mystery of communion with God and—as His chosen people—an agent of God's mission in the historical situations of Asia. By keeping in balance the concepts of communion and mission, the FABC's ecclesiology harmonises the divine and human dimensions of the Church,<sup>145</sup> the theological view and the sociological conception, the eschatological perspective of communion and the historical mission of the people of God. The Church is not only a community of *faith* on pilgrimage in Asia, but also a community of *hope* in the fullness of eschatological communion in the kingdom of God.

Like the appellation of the Church as a communion-in-mission, the FABC's second model of the Church as dialogue and solidarity emanates from its primary definition of the Church as a community of faith in Asia. This ecclesiological designation highlights a creative linkage between mission and dialogue, and between communion and solidarity,<sup>146</sup> with a pronounced emphasis on social justice and a preferential option for the poor in the Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*.<sup>147</sup> Church as a communion-in-mission now becomes a Church-in-dialogue, and a Church-in-solidarity. These images are the results of the FABC's contextual expression of the reality of the Church in response to the concrete, existential, and historical situations of Asia. The Church then is not only a community of *faith* but also a communion of *charity* and solidarity in Asia. Here,

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<sup>145</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8, describes the Church as “one complex reality which comes together from a human and divine element.” We could also argue that the FABC's motif of Church as a communion-in-mission encompasses both the gift and the task dimensions of the Church. For Joseph Komonchak, “the church is *both* God's gift—the mystery of his life communicated to us in word and grace—and our task—a human community constituted by the faith, hope and love of its members and by the social and interpersonal relationships those founding acts presuppose and engender.” See “The Church: God's Gift and Our Task,” *Origins* 16:42 (2 April 1987) 739.

<sup>146</sup> See FABC VI, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8.

<sup>147</sup> To a certain extent, one can say that the FABC's theology of the Church has heralded in Asia “the social gospel,” a term that “refers primarily to a social movement within the churches of North America, both in the U.S and Canada, which responded to the social injustices that emerged in the wake of the industrialization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.” See Roger Haight, “The Mission of the Church in the Theology of the Social Gospel,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988) 477.

we find again another clear example of the FABC's faithful application of Vatican II,<sup>148</sup> which teaches that the Church is "the community of faith, hope and charity."<sup>149</sup>

Discipleship is the third concept that the FABC employs to explicate the contextual nature and mission of the Church in Asia. This concept brings with it the personal, voluntary, and demanding dimension of people who are called to follow Christ. It goes beyond the merely universal view of the Church to the level of local communities out of which the one Church exists and realises itself in mission. It focuses on community as the locus of the mystery of the Church, and this mystery is concretely realised in basic ecclesial communities, a new way of being Church in Asia. Avery Dulles argues that the discipleship model, "taken primarily from the pre-Easter community of Jesus with his chosen followers," is "congruent with our everyday experience of Church," and could "resonate well with the situation and needs of the Church in our own day."<sup>150</sup>

A further strength of the FABC's ecclesiology is its emphasis on the relational character of the Church, which is, at its deepest level, a communion grounded in the life of the Trinity. This Trinitarian foundation offers a broad framework for integrating the vertical communion with the Triune God and the horizontal communion. It embraces two aspects: *ad intra* between Christians and *ad extra* with humanity. It also harmonises other ecclesiological dimensions such as the radical equality of all Christians as disciples in the Church, the Church's involvement in the world and its transformation, ongoing conscientisation and discernment in society, and the commitment to dialogue and solidarity with all peoples especially the poor

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<sup>148</sup> Analysing *Lumen Gentium* (no. 14), Gustave Thils reminds us that "having the Spirit of Christ" indicates a broader notion of ecclesial communion.... If invisible elements are also constitutive of the church, an individual or a community without charity is less *church*—even if the profession of faith and ministerial structure are present" ("Canon Law and Vatican II Ecclesiology," *Theology Digest* 31:3 [1984] 213).

<sup>149</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8; see also *ibid.*, nos. 64 and 65.

<sup>150</sup> Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad: 1982) 19, 9, 18. For Dulles, in some respects, the traditional images of People of God, Body of Christ, and Temple of the Holy Spirit "surpass the discipleship model in expressing the theological basis of the Church in the self-communication of the divine Trinitarian life. Community of disciples, however, has the advantages of being closer to our experience and of suggesting directions for appropriate renewal." See "Community of Disciples as a Model of the Church," *Philosophy and Theology* 1:2 (Winter 1986) 115-6.



and the oppressed. This relational, Trinitarian basis of the Church seals the intimate connection of communion and mission. The Church fulfils its mission to the extent that it is truly a communion, because the mission of the Church is first and foremost the mission of the Triune God.

In sum, the Asian bishops see the main challenge facing the Church in Asia as one of identity and change, that is, how the Church can be true to itself while being adaptive to remain relevant to the contemporary society of Asia. Their response is to hold in tension both Christological and pneumatological foci, faithful to Christ, the Gospel and tradition, and at the same time attentive to social and cultural changes, the signs of the times that are discerned as promptings of the Spirit in the Asian milieu. This contextual approach, anchored in the Trinitarian and relational foundation, offers new horizons for understanding the Church in Asia as a communion-in-mission, a community of dialogue and solidarity, and a disciple-community. It orients the Church towards new relationships and new structures based on communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility. In the contextual and relational ecclesiology of the FABC, which underscores the three themes of community, place, and networks,<sup>151</sup> the Church is not only a community of *faith*, but also a community of *faith, hope, and love* in Asia,<sup>152</sup> because it is fundamentally rooted in the mystery of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Andy Lord notes that “the search for contextual churches has gathered pace” with two publications: (i) starting from an observation that “in a network society the importance of place is secondary to the importance of ‘flows’ [and] ‘community and a sense of community are often disconnected from locality and geography,’” the [Anglican] Archbishops’ Council’s report *Mission-Shaped Church* (MSC) advocates “contextual churches building positively on the network character of contemporary communities”; (ii) on the contrary, John Inge’s *A Christian Theology of Place* (CTC) “argues for a fresh valuing of ‘place’ in our understanding of the church.” See “Searching for Contextual Churches,” *Theology* 109:849 (May-June 2006) 191. Both of these publications aim to address “the question of what shape the Church should take in the culture of today”; but, unlike MSC, which “accepts the move away from place to networks in a positive way,” CTC contends that “place shapes us as people, gives us a rooted home, and develops our humanity.” *Ibid.*, 194. We argue that the FABC’s ecclesiology brings together “the three themes of community, place and networks” proposed in these two documents by its constant focus on the models of the Church as a community of faith in Asia and a communion of communions, which are enhanced by a array of ecclesiological images such as a communion-in-mission, dialogue and solidarity, disciple-community, and basic ecclesial communities.

<sup>152</sup> St Augustin reminds us that “the whole purpose of the scriptures is development in faith, hope, and charity.” See R.J. Teske, “St. Augustin,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 1, (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 865.

<sup>153</sup> For a tabular summary of the interconnection between the Trinity and the three concepts of theological virtues see Peter Nguyen Van Hai, “Synthesis of Christian Doctrine Through Cognitive Mapping,” *Compass: A Review of Topical Theology* (Summer 1995) 38.

While its contextual and relational features prove to be most applicable and fruitful for the needs of the Church in Asia, our argument is that the FABC's ecclesiology is still beset by a fundamental theological difficulty relating to "the relationship between the way we understand God's nature and the way we understand the nature of the Church."<sup>154</sup> This ecclesiology could also be invigorated by a fuller treatment of the relationship between the local and universal Church, a more extensive development of the theology of the immanent Trinity and eschatology, and an exploration of the Marian dimension of the Church. First, following Peter Fisher's insightful remarks on *koinonia* ecclesiology, we note that the FABC seems to give an impression that "‘communion’ sums up the God-given character of the Church, whereas it may, in reality, only represent some aspects of that character," and hence, to a certain extent, proceeds to offer "a simplistic account of the relationship of God the Trinity to the Church" by implying "that we have knowledge of *God*, the three-in-one, of a kind or quality that we do not really possess" and by drawing "conclusions about *the Church* that may not confidently be drawn from assertions or beliefs about the Trinity."<sup>155</sup>

Secondly, like Vatican II, the Asian bishops emphasise the importance of Church as both a local and a universal reality.<sup>156</sup> For *Lumen Gentium*, four elements constitute a truly local Church: the presence of the Holy Spirit (nos. 4, 12), the proclamation of the Gospel (no. 5), the celebration of the sacraments (no. 7),<sup>157</sup> and the apostolic ministry of a bishop (nos. 8, 20).<sup>158</sup> Citing the same elements, the Asian bishops

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<sup>154</sup> Peter Fisher, "Koinonia and Conflict," *Theology* 104:822 (November-December 2001) 422.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 422-3.

<sup>156</sup> Bernard P. Prusak notes that, for Joseph Ratzinger, "*Lumen gentium* contains two theologies of Church that were never completely integrated. One begins from the universal Church and the college of bishops who are said to have full and supreme power over it, always with and under the pope as head; the other begins from the particular or local church and its bishop." See *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 301; see also Joseph Ratzinger, "La collegialità episcopale: spiegazione teologica," in *La Chiesa del Vaticano II*, edited by G. Barauna (Florence: vallecchi, 1965) 745-7, cited by Prusak, *ibid.*, 387.

<sup>157</sup> For Joseph Ratzinger, "Church and sacrament stand or fall together; a Church without sacraments would be an empty organization, and sacraments without Church would be rites without meaning or inner connection." See *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J.R. Foster (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969) 261.

<sup>158</sup> These four elements are also mentioned explicitly in the conciliar Degree *Christus Dominus*, no. 11. French theologians are fond to abbreviate these elements into four E's: "*Esprit*," "*évangile*,"

declare that diocese and parish are genuine communities of faith, and basic ecclesial communities a new way of being Church in Asia.<sup>159</sup> However, there is a certain ambiguity—and perhaps a deliberate avoidance to take sides—in their statements about the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church. To date, Church leaders and theologians have often co-opted the phrase “in and from which” in *Lumen Gentium* 23 to argue for the ontological priority of either the local or the universal Church. For example, in its 28 May 1992 letter on “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states that the universal Church is not the result of the communion of the local Churches, but is “a reality ontologically and temporarily prior to every individual particular Church.”<sup>160</sup> The universal Church, it says, is the model for particular Churches.<sup>161</sup> Walter Kasper, on the contrary, argues for the priority of the local Church.<sup>162</sup> For the FABC, the Church is a communion of communions, and the key

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“*eucharistie*,” and “*évêque*.” See Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Local Church,” *Chicago Studies* 28:3 (November 1989) 326; see also John McDonnell, “Church: A Christian Community of Disciples,” *Chicago Studies* 36:2 (August 1997) 176. For Karl Rahner, “the earliest local Church was a bishop’s Church.” See “The Episcopate and the Primacy,” in *The Episcopacy and the Primacy*, edited by Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger (Freiburg: Herder, 1966) 27. Louis Bouyer reminds us that Vatican II has “a rather poorly developed doctrine of the local Church” (*The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982] 170).

<sup>159</sup> In defining the local Church, Patrick Granfield proposes two senses of the term, claiming to respect the intention of Vatican II. In the strict sense, the local Church is primarily the diocese. In the broad sense, the local church refers to the parish (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 42), the family (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11), and other Christian communities (e.g., religious communities and basic ecclesial communities). See “The Church Local and Universal: Realization of Communion,” *The Jurist* 49 (1989) 454-5.

<sup>160</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” no. 9, *Origins* 22:7 (25 June 1992) 109. Analysing the vision of the Church in the Acts of the Apostles, Joseph Ratzinger argues that Luke’s depiction of the Pentecost shows that “at the moment of her birth, the Church was already catholic, already a world Church,” and that “the temporal and ontological priority lies with the universal; a Church that was not catholic would not even have ecclesial reality....” *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996) 44.

<sup>161</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” no. 7, *Origins* 22:7 (25 June 1992) 109.

<sup>162</sup> Walter Kasper, “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger,” *America* (23-30 April 2001) 8-14; also in *The Furrow* 52:6 (2001) 321-2, and “On the Church,” *The Tablet* (23 June 2001) 927-30. For further details on this theological debate see Joseph Ratzinger, “The Local Church and Universal Church: A Response to Walter Kasper,” *America* (19 November 2001) 7-11; Killian McDonnell, “The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches,” *Theological Studies* 63:2 (June 2002) 227-50. Analysing the theology of Joseph Ratzinger from his doctoral thesis on Augustin’s ecclesiology to later theological writings as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Miroslav Volf suggests that Ratzinger tends to focus on the oneness of substance in the Trinity and understands the Church “from the perspective of the whole,” rather than leaning towards

question is not which, the universal or the local, has priority,<sup>163</sup> but how the universality of the Church is experienced and expressed at a local level of the region, the nation, the diocese, the parish, and basic ecclesial communities.

Thirdly, the FABC's ecclesiology could also be enriched by a deeper exploration of the immanent aspect of its Trinitarian theology. To date, its approach to the Trinitarian question seems to be more *economic*, presenting the "vitality" of communion as an analogical reality that has a vertical and horizontal dimension with the Trinity and among the Christians.<sup>164</sup> Following Saint Paul,<sup>165</sup> the Asian bishops affirm that the Church is "the community of those who are restored into communion and fellowship (*koinonia*) among themselves, which is a communion and fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus in the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 1:1-3)."<sup>166</sup> They favour the use of symbolic descriptions of the Trinity because symbols can help in the understanding of theological doctrines and facilitate interreligious relationships.<sup>167</sup> However, they pay scant attention to the immanent Trinity.<sup>168</sup> Peter C. Phan observes

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the perichoresis of three persons in the Trinity as communion. See *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998) 47, 70-2. For Volf, "it is more consistent with Ratzinger's own (sketchy) trinitarian thinking to conceive ecclesial structures by way of the one substance of God." Ibid., 71.

<sup>163</sup> Raymond Brown notes that this issue of ontological and chronological priority is not simple, and he argues that "any thesis that would give priority to the local or regional church runs up against the indication in Acts that at one time the local community of Jerusalem was the whole Church." See "New Testament Background for the Concept of Local Church," *CTSA Proceedings* 36 (1981) 2.

<sup>164</sup> The FABC has perhaps paid heed to Catherine Mowry Lacugna's observation that "the decline in vitality of the doctrine of the Trinity resulted from the preoccupation with the internal and eternal aspects of the 'imminent' Trinity apart from the economy that was its original basis" ("The Trinitarian Mystery of God," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 2, edited by Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992) 174. Lacugna happily quoted Karl Rahner's axiom that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa." Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> For a detailed treatment of the Pauline understanding of *koinōnia* or communion see Bernard P. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 84-5; see also Patrick Granfield, "The Church Local and Universal: Realization of Communion," *The Jurist* 49 (1989) 449-71. Raymond E. Brown observes that "Paul is eloquent on the importance of *koinonia*, and in the Pauline heritage concern for Christian unity is visible in Luke/Acts and in Ephesians" (*The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984] 147).

<sup>166</sup> TAC, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," arts. 3.3.3.1, 4.11, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274-5, 285.

<sup>167</sup> OEIA, "Fourth Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs (FIRA IV)," art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 2 285.

<sup>168</sup> Patricia A. Fox reminds us that "by the medieval period in both Latin and Byzantine theology, the doctrine of the Trinity was understood to refer to the inner life of God, God in Godself, with little reference to God's deeds in history. This has meant that for a millennium and a half, the doctrine of the

that “there has been little interest on the FABC’s part in a purely philosophical or even theological discourse on God,”<sup>169</sup> and the Asian bishops concentrate instead on the economic Trinity, on “God’s activities in the world and God’s relationship to us in history, that is, in what God the Father has done for us and the world in his Son Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>170</sup> The bishops themselves acknowledged that the Sixth Plenary Assembly, which centres on the themes of Christian discipleship and service to life, was not “as explicitly Trinitarian in its wording as the Fathers, because it encompassed in its vision all Asian peoples with their immense variety of cultures and faiths.”<sup>171</sup>

The FABC also seems to concentrate on the “already” rather than the “not yet” of the Church, in the sense that it seems to be rather reticent about an explicit eschatology, a departure point for liberation theology.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, according to the indices of its three-volume collection of official documents issued between 1970 and 2001, the FABC mentions only once the idea of *eschaton*, in a section heading entitled: “Restoration of Dynamic Harmony in Christ.”<sup>173</sup>

Finally, unlike John Paul II who declared that “unless one looks to the Mother of God, it is impossible to understand the mystery of the Church, her reality, her essential vitality,”<sup>174</sup> the bishops of Asia almost ignored the Marian dimension in their

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Trinity has largely been restricted to consideration of the immanent Trinity” (*God as Communion* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001) 2.

<sup>169</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 121.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 4.7, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 281.

<sup>172</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza remarks that liberation theology “develops the implications of eschatology for Christology, ecclesiology, spirituality, and theological methodology.” See “The Church’s Religious Identity and Its Social and Political Mission,” *Theological Studies* 43:2 (June 1982) 204. For Fiorenza, liberation theology “stresses the unity of salvation history and world history, and thereby links eschatology and human liberation. The Church not only uses eschatology as a source of critique but also strives for authentic anticipations and incomplete realizations within history of the eschatological reality.” Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> See TAC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” art. 4.5, *FAPA vol. 3*, 280.

<sup>174</sup> See “Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year [15 August 1988],” no. 22, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-)

ecclesiology. Indeed, except for the recurrent invocation of Mary for her intercession, usually in the last paragraph of their statements,<sup>175</sup> or some brief and rare statements on Mariology and the Marian devotion,<sup>176</sup> their writings tend to concern the idea of Christian discipleship.<sup>177</sup> The FABC's ecclesiology is also in marked contrast with Joseph Ratzinger who considered the Marian understanding of the Church as "the most decisive contrast to a purely organizational or bureaucratic concept of the

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[ii\\_apl\\_15081988\\_mulieris-dignitatem\\_en.html](http://ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html) (accessed 17 December 2008). For John Paul II, "as Virgin and Mother, Mary remains for the Church a 'permanent model'. It can therefore be said that especially under this aspect, namely as a model, or rather as a 'figure', Mary, present in the mystery of Christ, remains constantly present also in the mystery of the Church." See *The Mother of the Redeemer: Encyclical Letter 'Redemptoris Mater' of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Church*, March 25, 1987 (United States Catholic Conference: Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1987) 92-3. In this encyclical, the Pontiff quoted Paul VI's statement that "'knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary will always be a key to the exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church'." Ibid., 102; see also no. 27, where the Pope teaches that the Church has both a Marian dimension and an apostolic-Petrine dimension. Ibid. Hans Urs von Balthasar recalls John Paul II's "description of Mary as the memory of the Church" when the Pontiff announced the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* in 1987. See *Mary for Today*, (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1987) 33. He goes on to assert that this description shows "a quite important aspect of her relationship to the Church," and suggests that it is "from her memory that we should look at the mysteries of Jesus' life, and thereby at those of the Trinitarian embodiment of salvation." Ibid., 33, 44. The memory of Mary, the *ecclesia immaculata*, concludes von Balthasar, was "the unsullied tablet on which the Father, through the Spirit, could write his entire Word." Ibid. 40, 45. For Kurt Kock, *Redemptoris Mater*, an encyclical that sets forth the meaning of the Marian year in 1987, is "decisively christological," and has "a strong ecclesiological emphasis" ("Reactions to *Redemptoris Mater*," *Theology Digest* 35:1 [Spring 1988] 9, 10). To support his argument, Kock cited *inter alia* nos. 4 and 40, which state respectively that "the Marian mystery is made clear 'only in the mystery of Christ'," and that "'Mary is ... present in the mystery of the church as a model'." Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> For instance, FABC III, art. 24, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 61; FABC IV, art. 5.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 198; FABC I, art. 33, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 25; FABC VII, Conclusion, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 16.

<sup>176</sup> OL, BILA on Women II, art. 4.2.8, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 76; OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," art. 4.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 315-6. Commenting on Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium* on Mary, Thomas Halton reminds us that "one of the most enlightened perceptions of Vatican II was that it should not treat Ecclesiology and Mariology as separate subjects." See *The Church. Messages of the Fathers of the Church* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1985) 16.

<sup>177</sup> FABC IV, art. 5.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 198; FABC VI, art. 14.6, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 10; OL and OHD, "Realities and Experiences of Women in Asia," *FAPA Vol. 2*, 115; BILA on Women II, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 75; BILA on Women [I], "Role of Women in Church and Society Toward 2000," art. 5.4, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 95. We argue that, like Vatican II, the FABC seems to adopt "the 'minimalist' line in Marian thinking." See Kari Børresen, "Mary in Catholic Theology," *Concilium* 168 (1983) 53. Børresen contends that "the council's attitude was a result of the return to patristic sources that has characterised Catholic theology in the twentieth century." Ibid. It's worthwhile to recall that "by a vote of 1,114 to 1,074 the *Second Vatican Council* decided on 29 October 1963 to include its statement on Mary within the dogmatic constitution on the church, *Lumen gentium*." Ibid. For Børresen, "this marked the end of Mariology properly so-called and a return to an ecclesiological approach." Ibid.

Church.”<sup>178</sup> Ratzinger went further to assert that “it is only in being Marian that we become the Church.”<sup>179</sup>

In sum, the FABC has shown little interest in the discourse on the Marian dimension of the Church, the immanent Trinity, and eschatology. There is also some ambiguity regarding the concept of *communio* as applied to the Triune God and the people of God, and the ontological priority of the local Church or the universal Church. Notwithstanding these limitations, the FABC’s contextual ecclesiology of dialogue, which mirrors the theological thrust of Vatican II, has ushered in an intense period of engagement with the world of Asia by a double act of discerning the signs of the times, and updating the Church. This rich ecclesiology of the FABC provides a solid framework for understanding the identity and role of lay people. The interconnection between the FABC’s theology of the laity and its ecclesiological foundation will be briefly discussed and summarised in the next section.

## **7.5 Ecclesiological Foundations of the FABC’s Theology of the Laity: a Comparative View**

The figure below aims to highlight the correlation between the Asian bishops’ ecclesiology and their theology of the laity. This correlation is important in two ways. First, the bishops of Asia do not emphasise the institutional, clerical or juridical aspect of the Church, a view that has unfortunately been held by Asian Christians for many centuries.<sup>180</sup> This point is not merely terminological; it is substantive. For the issues at

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<sup>178</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (Middlegreen, Slough, England: St Paul Publications, 1988) 20.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. Ratzinger’s view was along the lines argued by Anthony J. Kelly who concluded his insightful paper on Christian faith and Bernard Lonergan’s *Method in Theology* by stressing that “perhaps everything we have said adds up to this: the need of theology to become more Marian as service to the given Word. Only such a feminism can make theological method adequately Christian” (“Lonergan’s ‘Method’ and Christian Mystery,” *Theology Digest* 24:2 [Summer 1976] 178). Kelly expanded this theme later in his discussion of “the significance of Mary in the Church, and the meaning of Marian doctrines and symbols within the matrix of the most fundamental of all Christian affirmations: ‘God is Love’.” See “Mary and the Creed: Icon of the Trinitarian Love,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004) 29. For the Australian theologian, the Church is a “community of love in history,” and “in Mary, the Church finds expressed what it is called to be.” Ibid., 19.

<sup>180</sup> In his survey of two thousand years of Church history, Bernard P. Prusak observes that the period of from 600 to 1400 was marked by an increasing institutionalism, clericalism, and juridicism when the

stake in defining the role of the laity in the Asian Church are neither exhausted nor chiefly determined by their relationship to the Church as institution, as clergy, and as hierarchy. Our argument is that to correctly understand the FABC's view of the role of the laity one has to restate the question in terms of its fuller understandings of the Church, as in "the role of the laity in the Church as a community of faith in Asia," "the role of the laity in the Church as communion in mission," "the role of the laity in the Church as dialogue and solidarity," "the role of the laity in the Church as disciple-community," and "The role of the laity in the Church as basic ecclesial communities." In any of these considerations the role of the laity ceases to be reduced to a mere discussion of their specific role, rights, and responsibilities as compared to those of the clergy and hierarchy. Lay people are no longer pitted against the clergy and their mutual relationship is not one that is driven by opposition and tension. Secondly, as lay people are defined as Asian Christians—a term that includes the clergy—in the Church viewed primarily as a community of faith in Asia, the role of the laity and the role of the Church are closely integrated.

As a summary the table here presented contains only generalisations, and at times the pieces do not nicely fit. However, it hopes to offer a theological spectrum that can assist in the evaluation of the Asian bishops' theology of the laity in subsequent chapters. This figure shows that there is a surprising convergence in both content and structure between their theologies of the laity and of the Church. It underlines the mutual influence of these theological endeavours: the bishops' treatment of the vocation and mission of lay people is based on their ecclesiology, which, in turn, reflects a theological insight and a contextual sensibility that is sharpened by their investigation into the role of the laity as Asian Christians. For the FABC, not only faith, but faith, hope, and love are the Christian experience and the starting point for theology. In this sense, theology is not merely an endeavour to understand the faith, but also a concrete realisation of the Christian hope and love, in short, a praxis<sup>181</sup>; that

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Church became a Roman Empire-like Christendom. See *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004) 176-228.

<sup>181</sup> Here, following F. Taborda, the term *praxis* is understood as "a concrete form of historical commitment and involvement, stemming from a twofold awareness: that history is made in time and that is the result of human actions stemming from concrete choices. *Praxis*, then, is the conscious making of history, and Christian praxis is the concrete living out of the historical dimensions of the faith. Christian *praxis* is the daily, long-term embodiment and direction given to the service that faith



is, it seeks not just to understand, but to transform.<sup>182</sup> The Church, as a communion-in-mission, a community of dialogue and solidarity, a disciple-community, and a sacrament of peace and harmony, is not only a community of faith, but is also a community of faith, hope, and charity in Asia.<sup>183</sup> This community in turn is concretised and historically realised in basic ecclesial communities, the seedbed of a Church totally geared to the evangelising mission. As such, the FABC's theologies of the laity and of the Church together offer one of the best examples of contextualising the theology of Vatican II. They also retrieve and deepen the four main topics of Yves Congar's ecclesiology, namely, reform in the Church, the Church as communion, the relation of Church and world, and the role of the laity.<sup>184</sup>

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demands." See "Fé cristã e práxis histórica," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 41(1981) 250-78; quoted by Marcelo de C. Azevedo in "Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies," *Theological Studies* 46:4 (December 1985) 617. For Anthony J. Kelly, the notion of *praxis* theology "does not mean being pragmatic," and "the genuine *praxis* of Catholic theology must be a splendid work of imagination". See "Praxis and Pragmatism in an Australian Theology," *The Australian Catholic Record* 71:3 (1994) 274, 272. Kelly proposes six points for further discussion of the new *praxis* orientation in theology : i. "theology has to become more keenly aware of itself as an activity, as a conduct, rather than as mere intellectual construct or product"; ii. "the accent on *praxis* underscores the role of theology in the discriminating self-constitution of the Church within the social and increasingly global reality of our world"; iii. "the notion of *praxis* emphasises that both Church and theology within the Church must not conceive themselves as a closed system of meaning"; iv. "this communicative *praxis* of theology occurs within history"; v. "the historical *praxis* of theology, if it is to promote the concerns of the Gospel, must be social, and inclusively so"; vi. "*praxis* means politics." Ibid., 262-5. According to Kelly, these six features "indicate, at least implicitly, a richer sense of theology as a meaning-making activity. Up to recent past, theology has been notably well-developed as a cognitive *praxis*, more or less akin to Aristotle's 'theoria'." Ibid., 265.

<sup>182</sup> OTC, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology," art. 4.2.4.5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 375-6.

<sup>183</sup> This ecclesiological view of the FABC is no doubt based on *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8, which affirms that "the one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicated truth and grace to all men."

<sup>184</sup> See Chapter 2; see also Yves M.J Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, revised edition with additions by the author, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) [Originally published as *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* by Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1953, revised edition, with addenda, published in France in 1964]; *The Mystery of the Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edition (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965); *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf) 1971; *Diversity and Communion*. London: SCM Press, 1984; "Letter from Father Yves Congar, O.P.," *Theology Digest* 32:3 (Fall 1985) 215.

**Ecclesiological Foundations of the FABC's Theology of the Laity:  
A Comparative Summary**

	<b>Theology of the Laity</b>	<b>Ecclesiology</b>
<b>Topics</b>	<b>Themes and Concepts</b>	
<b>Vocation</b>	The laity, as Asian Christians, are called to a communion with Jesus and a communion of liberation	The Church, as a community of faith in Asia, is called to a communion with the Triune God and a discipleship in the Gospel
<b>Mission</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Christ-centred: triple messianic function: priestly, prophetic, pastoral</li> <li>2. Kingdom-focused</li> <li>3. World-oriented</li> <li>4. Dialogical</li> <li>5. Liberative</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evangelisation</li> <li>2. Building up God's kingdom</li> <li>3. Mission to the world</li> <li>4. Mission as triple dialogue</li> <li>5. Social justice</li> </ol>
<b>Developments</b>	<p>After FABC IV (1986) more emphasis on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. World orientation</li> <li>2. Contextualisation based on geographical regions</li> <li>3. Empowerment of lay people</li> <li>4. Integral formation <i>of</i> and <i>for</i> lay people</li> <li>5. Spirituality of authentic discipleship and harmony</li> </ol>	<p>After FABC III (1982) more emphasis on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Church as communion-in-mission to the world</li> <li>2. Church as dialogue and solidarity</li> <li>3. Church as disciple-community</li> <li>4. Basic Christian communities as a new way of being Church in Asia</li> <li>5. Church as sacrament of peace and harmony</li> </ol>
<b>Approaches</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contextual: faithful to Vatican II and adapting to the Asian context</li> <li>2. Relational: triple relationship with Christ, the Church, and the world</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contextual: faithful to the living presence of Christ (Christological), and attentive to the signs of the times discerned as promptings of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatological)</li> <li>2. Relational: Trinitarian</li> </ol>

## 7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the ecclesiological foundations of the FABC's theology of the laity. Underlying this theology is an ecclesiology that defines the Church primarily as a community of faith in Asia. This ecclesiology is essentially Christocentric, pneumatological, and Trinitarian. It begins mainly from below and from within, in the concrete, existential and historical community, and takes shape in the communion and mission of local Churches, in particular basic ecclesial communities. It is characterised by a profoundly sacramental and regnocentric dimension, and strengthened by a deliberately contextual and relational orientation. The shift in emphasis in the Asian bishops' treatment of the role of lay people corresponds to the development of their view of the Churches in Asia, caught in the inexorable and accelerated changes of Asian societies. In the FABC documents, the Church as a community of believers does not refer simply to the institution or the hierarchy. It is the community of people who believe in Christ and who are the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, realised in concrete basic ecclesial communities. It is in these small communities that the mystery of Christ is realised and the Church's mission undertaken.

When Pope Pius XII first lent the Church's authority to the exalted dignity of the laity by declaring in 1946 that lay people are the Church,<sup>185</sup> he formally brought to an end a theological and pastoral tendency to treat them as merely passive members of the Church. But there was more to it than merely acknowledging the important role of lay people in the mission of the Church. Over the next fifty years, powerfully stimulated by Vatican II's constitutions *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and in particular the degree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the theology of the laity took on a life of its own. In the hands of the bishops of Asia, from 1970 to 2001, it is intimately linked to their contextual ecclesiology and unifies their teaching on the Church's evangelising mission with such deep insights as the triple dialogue of life and basic ecclesial

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<sup>185</sup> In his address to the new cardinals on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1946, Pius XII affirmed that "... i fedeli, e più precisamente i laici, si trovano nella linea più avanzata della vita della Chiesa; per loro la Chiesa è il principio vitale della società umana. Perciò essi, specialmente essi, debbono avere una sempre più chiara consapevolezza, non soltanto di appartenere alla Chiesa, ma di essere la Chiesa, vale a dire la comunità dei fedeli ... Essi sono la Chiesa." Acta PII PP. XII: Allocutiones I, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 38 (1946) 149.

communities. In fact, the Asian bishops have scarcely issued an official statement where the theme of evangelisation did not dominate. It is the basis of their entire theology, which places particular emphasis on the role of the laity as Asian Christians in carrying out the Church's mission in the world. The Asian bishops have also overseen a synthesis of three theological dimensions of the Church that have traditionally been explored separately in ecclesiological treatises: Christological, pneumatological, and Trinitarian. By giving their ecclesiology a Christological and pneumatological focus they relate the Church to both magisterial teachings and the contextual realities of Asia. By linking this double dimension to the Trinitarian perspective, they emphasise that the Church is animated by the Triune God, and more fundamentally, belongs to the Trinitarian mystery. Despite these ecclesiological features which are both faithful to the tradition and fruitful in the Asian context, the FABC's ecclesiology could be deepened by a clarification of the connection between God's *communio* and the communion of the Church. It could also be enriched by a fuller treatment of the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church, the theology of the immanent Trinity, eschatology, and in particular the Marian dimension of the Church.

In the FABC's rich ecclesiology, lay people are the principal agents of the Church's redemptive mission in the world. They are not the bridge in the world; they are the Church in the world. Indeed, the analysis and review of the FABC's theology of the laity and its ecclesiological framework has touched upon several themes discussed in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici* and *Ecclesia in Asia*. A comparative assessment of the FABC's theology of the laity with reference to these Apostolic Exhortations will be provided in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 8

### JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY AND THE TEACHINGS OF THE ASIAN BISHOPS

#### 8.1 Introduction

In his assessment of John Paul II's achievements in the twilight of his long pontificate Jewish human rights activist Elie Wiesel, who was receiver of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, states that if John XXIII has opened the windows of the Church by his vision and actions, then John Paul II opened its doors.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, John Paul II's journeys to all parts of the world highlighted the Catholic presence as never before.<sup>2</sup> During those pilgrimages the Pontiff never failed to meet with lay people or to discuss the laity

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<sup>1</sup> Elie Wiesel, "Pope John Paul II: Pointing the Way to Reconciliation," *Time* (26 April 2004) 67. The Church, John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on missionary activity, "opens her doors and becomes the house which all may enter and in which all can feel at home while keeping their own culture and traditions, provided that these are not contrary to the Gospel." See "*Redemptoris Missio*," no. 24, *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 549. His pontificate lasted more than twenty-six years, from 16 October 1978 to 2 April 2005. Delivering a keynote address at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake in honour of the twentieth anniversary of the pontificate of John Paul II, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger called him "the Pope of Vatican II," and made a striking claim that John Paul II deserves this title more than John XXIII, who conceived and launched the Second Vatican Council, and Paul VI who led it to completion. See "Twenty Years of John Paul II's Pontificate," *Chicago Studies* 39:2 (Summer 2000) 117-132. Avery Dulles has a more balanced assessment considering that "John Paul II, like Paul VI, is pre-eminently a pope of the Second Vatican Council" ("The Ecclesiology of John Paul II," *Origins* 28:44 [22 April 1999] 759). Paul Johnson believes that "in the light of eternity, the work of John XXIII and of John Paul II is of comparable importance. Both men will be treated by history as great Popes" ("Kitchen Pope, Warrior Pope," *Time* [26 December 1994 - 2 January 1995] 39). For Johnson, by nature Pope John was a pastoralist, and Pope John Paul was an intellectual Pope and a warrior Pope, "a Pope for the public forum, for the vast congregation and the open battlefield, where the forces of Christianity fight for survival in an often hostile world." *Ibid.*, 38-9. Arguing that by the time Pope Paul VI died in 1978, "the church was in its worst crisis since the Protestant Reformation," Johnson contends that "their main achievements – John's in introducing the Catholic reformation and John Paul's in terminating it – are simply weighty." *Ibid.* Peter Hebblethwaite notes that, unlike Pope Paul VI, who was "cautious, dilatory, diplomatic and reluctant to provoke an open break," always seeking "compromise which meant that, as he put it, there would be *pas de vaincus, mais des convaincus* (no vanquished, but only the convinced)," John Paul II "likes to tackle problems head-on" (*The New Inquisition: Schillebeeckx and Küng* [London: Collins, 1980] 105).

<sup>2</sup> The Pontiff made 104 overseas trips and 146 pastoral visits inside Italy, and in Rome, he visited 317 of the 333 parishes. See Gianni Colzani, "Between Wojtyla and Ratzinger," *Theology Digest* 52:3 (Fall 2005) 217. For F. Houtart, becoming Pope in 1978, in the difficult post-Vatican II period, John Paul II's twin objective was "to restore a church shaken by the aftermath of the Council and to reinforce its presence in society." *Ibid.*, 219. Australian Prime Minister John Howard describes Pope John Paul II as "a man of enormous courage and dignity whose words of faith and hope inspired millions behind the Iron Curtain to dream again of a Europe whole and free" ("A Tribute to *Quadrant*," *Quadrant* [November 2006] 23).

question to emphasise their role and responsibility. Addressing the Italian Episcopal Conference in May 1985 he recalled the importance that Vatican II had placed on the laity's contribution to the mission of the Church in the world and gave two reasons for choosing the vocation and the mission of the laity as the topic of the 1987 Ordinary Synod of Bishops, the first being "the increased awareness of the role that the laity play in the work of salvation,"<sup>3</sup> and the second relating to the need to respond to the suggestion of many bishops throughout the world. Fifteen months after the conclusion of this Synod John Paul II promulgated the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*.<sup>4</sup> He would often revisit and deepen this topic in his vast corpus of writings and speeches in subsequent years up until his final pilgrimage on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005. One of the significant writings during this period is *Ecclesia in Asia*,<sup>5</sup> the Apostolic Exhortation that he promulgated in 1999, one year after the close of the Synod for Asia. In this *magna carta* for the people of God in Asia, he discusses *inter alia* the role of lay people within the context of evangelisation, a mission that he considers as "an absolute priority"<sup>6</sup> for the Asian Church.

The first section of this chapter explores John Paul II's theology of the laity as presented in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1989). The second examines his view of the vocation and mission of lay people in *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999). While these two post-synodal documents provide ample material for a good understanding of John Paul II's theology of the laity, other writings and addresses that the Pope had either composed or delivered will also be considered.<sup>7</sup> The final section

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, "[Address to the Italian Episcopal Conference:] Propose Suitable Pastoral Lines in the Light of Loreto Discourse," *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 September 1985) 9.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, "*Christifideles Laici*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World," *Origins* 18:35 (9 February 1989) 561, 563-595. Henceforth, in footnotes, the full title will be simplified to *Christifideles Laici* followed by relevant numbers. Occasional reference will be made to the Latin version of the document which was published as "*Adhortatio Apostolica Post-Synodalis: Ad Episcopos, Sacerdotes et Diaconos atque Religiosos Viros ac Mulieres omnesque christifideles Laicos: de vocatione et missione Laicorum in Ecclesia et in mundo*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81:4 (14 April 1989) 393-521.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, "*Ecclesia in Asia*," *Origins* 29:23 (18 November 1999) 357, 359-84. Hereafter, only the title *Ecclesia in Asia* and relevant numbers will be used in footnotes.

<sup>6</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 2.

<sup>7</sup> While *Christifideles Laici* is the primary source of the Pope's theology of the laity, his view on the role of the laity can also be gathered from the catechetical lectures he gave in general audiences

provides a comparative study of the theologies of the laity according to John Paul II and the Catholic bishops of Asia.

In this chapter we suggest that the baptismal identity and dignity of Christians lies at the heart of John Paul II's theology of the laity in *Christifideles Laici*, and that it is the logic of faith as gift and evangelisation as task that underlines and unifies the entire *Ecclesia in Asia*. We also argue that "witness of life" is a comprehensive concept that the Pope employs to describe and prescribe the identity and role of lay people in Asia. As a concrete expression of the integration of faith, Christian living, and proclamation, this notion occupies a central place in *Ecclesia in Asia* and is a succinct summary of its theology of the laity. This chapter also proposes a new approach to interpreting John Paul II's theology of mission, one that is based on a distinction between the theological firmness (*fortiter*) with which he imposes compliance with the principle of proclamation and the pastoral flexibility (*suaviter*) that he encourages in the practice of triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions and the poor of Asia. There is a discernible progression from *Christifideles Laici* to *Ecclesia in Asia*. The former papal document is a universal charter for Christian laity throughout the entire Church and the latter displays a more contextualised view of their role in the Asian context. In *Christifideles Laici* the vocation and mission of the lay faithful are articulated from a predominantly Trinitarian and ecclesiological perspective. On the other hand, *Ecclesia in Asia* proceeds from a deliberately Christological and Pneumatological interpretation of the mission of the Church in which lay people fully participate. The chapter concludes that, except for some minor difference in the interpretation of the identity and role of lay people in the Asian Church, there is a substantial convergence between the theology of the laity in *Ecclesia in Asia* and the documents of the Catholic bishops of Asia.<sup>8</sup>

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between 27 October 1993 and 21 September 1994. See *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998) 409-527.

<sup>8</sup> In this thesis we also employ the terms "the Asian bishops" and "the bishops of Asia" interchangeably to refer to the Catholic bishops of Episcopal Conferences in East Asia that are members of the FABC, and add a qualifying term "Middle East" or "Middle Eastern" when referring to the other block of bishops who made up the Asian Synod.

## 8.2 The Laity in *Christifideles Laici* (1989)

The Seventh General Assembly of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops,<sup>9</sup> commonly known as the Synod on the Laity, was held in Rome from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> October 1987. On 30<sup>th</sup> January 1989, the Apostolic Exhortation was released at the Vatican.<sup>10</sup> The Pope declared that it is a fruit of the Synod process and “a faithful and coherent expression of it,”<sup>11</sup> having explicitly quoted about forty-five out of the fifty-four Synod’s final propositions. As the most important papal statement on the laity since the Second Vatican Council, this document has occasioned considerable publicity, aroused immense interest, inspired so much passion, and generated numerous treatises and comments from both experts and practitioners.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in this section we intend to provide only a brief summary of the exhortation to highlight its ecclesiological and Trinitarian approach, and then concentrate on exploring its main themes under a series of observations and offering critical reflections on its teachings with reference to Vatican II, the final report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, pre-synodal documents of the 1987 Synod such as the *Instrumentum Laboris* or working paper, the propositions, and notable interventions by participants, and as far as practicable, to other writings of the Pope. This approach will allow us to distil the main features of the document that characterise his theology of the laity and provide an adequate gauge of the theological issues discussed at the Synod.<sup>13</sup> It also enables

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<sup>9</sup> The institution of the Synod of Bishops was created by Pope Paul VI in 1965 aiming to address issues that are *pastoral* in character, *urgent*, and of importance for the *universal* Church. The word “Synod” means “a journey together.” This Ordinary Synod differs from the Extraordinary Synods held in 1969 and 1985 in that they have more participants, have a fuller agenda and take place over a longer period.

<sup>10</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation carries the date of 30 December 1988, feast of the Holy Family.

<sup>11</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed reference see Section 2.4 of the Bibliography: “*Christifideles Laici* and the 1987 Synod on the Laity.”

<sup>13</sup> The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, in some sense, is written by both the Pope and the bishops of the Synod as it is based on the propositions voted by the Synod delegates. Avery Dulles observes that while many of the Pope’s official writings are personal in tone, it is difficult to be sure whether works published under his name were actually written by him. The Pope has no doubt relied on his assistants to compile many of the footnotes, and they most likely wrote parts of the actual text. See Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 2. Robert Mickens also notes that “popes tend to say and write a lot of things—but most of it comes from the hands of others.... It’s a long-standing game among Vatican watchers to try to discern which of these come directly from the Pope’s hand and which from his ghostwriters” (“Letter from Rome, *The Tablet* [27 January 2007] 33).



us to identify the unity of his thinking on the subject, which drew its inspiration from conciliar teachings. In the process, we hope to highlight its contributions and unresolved issues that require further analysis and clarification. One of these issues has to do with the very nature of the Church. For instance, while Vatican II operated with a number of images and biblical metaphors such as People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, flock, mother, spouse, and vineyard, John Paul II chose the biblical paradigms of the vine and the vineyard as his starting point. In analysing the theological themes relating to lay people such as their dignity, identity, vocation, mission, ministry, secularity, spirituality, formation, and ecclesiological framework we note that there is a strong linkage between the teachings of Vatican II and *Christifideles Laici*.

### **8.2.1 Overview of the Contents, Structure, and Context of *Christifideles Laici***

*Christifideles Laici*, a “small Summa for the Catholic laity,”<sup>14</sup> has five chapters besides an introduction (sections 1-7), and a short conclusion (section 64) comprising an appeal and a prayer. It focuses on three themes: vocation, communion, and mission of lay people, and two biblical images: Jesus as the true vine (John 15:5, 16) and the vineyard parable (Matthew 20). These themes and images are intensely ecclesiological as they are based on the central image of the true vine and developed in the first three chapters of the document under the ecclesiological headings of Church as mystery, Church as communion, and Church as mission. In choosing these headings, the Pope articulated an understanding that the vocation and mission of lay people is integral to, and inseparable from, that of the entire people of God, and in so doing he was likely mindful of the principle enunciated by Yves Congar, who stresses that “there can be only one sound and sufficient theology of the laity,” and that is a “total ecclesiology.”<sup>15</sup> The Pontiff had earlier underscored this point in his introductory letter to the Working Paper where he affirmed that the “synod on the laity also seeks to confirm the church’s vocation, to strengthen her and to give her fresh impulses and motivations, so that she may be able to respond to pastoral needs

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<sup>14</sup> Pironio, Cardinal Eduardo, “The Laity as Agents of Evangelization,” *Origins* 18:42 (30 March 1989) 700.

<sup>15</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, revised ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985) xvi.

with complete fidelity to the Spirit who guides her.”<sup>16</sup> The themes and images are also predominantly Trinitarian as they reflect on the presence and action of God in history and in the lives of each Christian. This presence and action is of God as Trinity: the Father calls to communion in Jesus Christ, his Son, and to mission through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 1, comprising 10 paragraphs (8-17), defines the lay faithful’s position in the Church by reflecting on “The Dignity of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mystery” under the title “I am the Vine and You are the Branches.” After discussing the mystery of the vine and giving a basic, positive description of the lay faithful, it stresses that baptism is the Trinitarian source of the lay Christian’s dignity, identity, and new life; the lay faithful are sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Jesus Christ, characterised by their secular character or presence in the world; all faithful are called to holiness, and this holiness is lived out in the world. Chapter 2, which bears the title “All Branches of a Single Vine,” explores the meaning of communion, emphasises the participation of the faithful in the Church as communion, and deals with three topics: ministries and charisms, universal and local Church, and associations and movements. Under the title of “I Have Appointed You to Go Forth and Bear Fruit” the third chapter reflects on the role of the lay faithful in the Church as mission, highlighting the need for co-responsibility, new evangelisation, and the myriad of ways in which lay people can serve the individual human person and the society. Chapter 4 discusses the variety of lay vocations based on the image of the vineyard and focuses on issues relating to women. The final chapter returns to the Johannine image of the vine and deals with the formation of the lay faithful. With this summary of the contents and structure of the Apostolic Exhortation we will be embarking on a critical analysis of its theological themes after a brief discussion of the context.

There were 232 participants or “Synod Fathers” in the 1987 Synod including “153 representatives of the Episcopal Conferences, 14 representatives of the Assemblies of the patriarchs and bishops of the Oriental Churches, 23 cardinals or bishops of the Roman Curia, 10 representatives of the Union of Superiors General,” and “30 other

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<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, “The Pope’s Letter to Bishops on the Synod Working Paper,” *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 20.

bishops or priests directly nominated by the Pope,”<sup>17</sup> who could nominate 15% of the Synod Fathers.<sup>18</sup> Of the delegates from the Episcopal Conferences, 47 were from Africa, 36 from Asia, 65 from the Americas, 75 from Europe, and 7 from Oceania.<sup>19</sup> Of all the Synod Fathers, 114 participated for the first time at a Synod and 63 were members of religious orders.

It is worthwhile to recall the background of the key figures who guided the Synod. The Relator was Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum who succeeded Marcel Lefèbvre in 1962 as the first autonomous Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal.<sup>20</sup> The appointed Special Secretary, the key theologian of the Synod, was Pierre Eyt, co-adjutor Bishop of Bordeaux and member of the International Theological Commission, who had served as secretary to the Tübingen theologian Walter Kasper at the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, where the latter was Special Secretary under the leadership of Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels. There was some expectation that Thiandoum and Eyt would perform as successfully as the Danneels-Kasper team. The pair was supported by 20 expert assistants who were chosen by the Pope on the advice of the Synod Secretariat and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Gerard O’Connell felt that the list of these expert assistants “left the distinct impression of being of a more conservative hue than one might have hoped for,”<sup>21</sup> and he recalled that “the absence of an Asian expert was a sore point with some of the Asian delegates at the Synod.”<sup>22</sup> One of the three Synod presidents designated by the Pope was Cardinal R. Vidal of Cebu, appointed to replace Cardinal Jean-Marie Trịnh Văn Căn of Hanoi, who was not allowed to leave

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<sup>17</sup> Noted by Peter Coughlan, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, in *The Hour of the Laity: Their Expanding Role: Exploring “Christifideles Laici”: The Pope’s Key Document on the Laity* (Newtown, NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1989) 10; see also Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions?” *The Month* (March 1988) 572.

<sup>18</sup> This 15 per cent of the total category “enables the Pope to restore any imbalance that may arise between different tendencies or countries but also provides him with the opportunity of strengthening his position.” See Jan Kerkhofs, “The Members of the Synod,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 47-8.

<sup>19</sup> Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions?” *The Month* (March 1988) 572-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 575.

Vietnam.<sup>23</sup> The other two presidents were European, one of whom was Cardinal E. Pirono, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity from April 1984, and the other the Major Archbishop of Lwow of the Ukrainians. A distinctive feature of the 1987 Synod was the presence and participation of 60 lay auditors from 44 countries and all five continents, of whom 28 were women including five religious women, a figure that Gerard O'Connell described as a historic maximum.<sup>24</sup> The Pope himself appointed the lay auditors on the recommendations of the Synod Secretariat who based their decisions on five selection criteria relating different conditions of lay life, different continents and countries, different sectors of Christian movements, different professional and cultural milieux, and different states of life (religious, secular institutes, etc).<sup>25</sup> As auditors, lay participants did not have the right to vote but otherwise participated as fully as other Synod Fathers. Their active presence was demonstrated by the fact that all of them participated in the discussions in the *Circuli Minores* or small language groups with six of them appointed as experts or assistants to the Special Secretary, and two actually sitting at the table of the Presidency. These *circuli* focused on four themes suggested by the Relator, namely the secular character of the vocation and mission of the laity, lay associations and their relations with the pastors, ministries of lay people in the Church today, and the vocation and mission of women in the Church and in the world.<sup>26</sup> In all, 17 lay people (10 women and 7 men) addressed the Synod Assembly with each given twenty minutes while interventions of the Synod Fathers were limited to eight minutes.<sup>27</sup> Five of these speakers were special

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<sup>23</sup> [Editor], "Asian Voices in the Synod," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 25:1 (1988) 11. Gerard O'Connell notes that "in fact the Vietnamese Cardinal is ill" ("The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions," *The Month* [March 1988] 575).

<sup>24</sup> [Editor], "Asian Voices in the Synod," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 25:1 (1988) 11; Gerard O'Connell, "The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions," *The Month* (March 1988) 573; Kerkhofs observes lay auditors took part in the Second Vatican Council from 12 September 1963 onwards ("The Members of the Synod," *Concilium* 188 [1986] 51).

<sup>25</sup> Gerard O'Connell, "The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions," *The Month* (March 1988) 573.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 577; B.L. Marthaler, "Synod of Bishops (Seventh General Assembly, 1987)," *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years* (Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2001) 158.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Coughlan, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Hour of the Laity: Their Expanding Role: Exploring "Christifideles Laici": The Pope's Key Document on the Laity* (Newtown, NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1989) 10.

invitees and not part of the 60 lay person delegation.<sup>28</sup> John Paul II singled out the importance of the presence of lay people in his homily at the closing mass of the Synod. For him, “in a certain sense, the experience of this Synod is unprecedented,” and he hopes that “it will become a ‘model’, a reference point for the future.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in this Synod, the lay presence was far more in evidence in numbers and in their manner of participation than in previous ones such as the 1980 Synod on the family and the 1983 Synod on penance and reconciliation. Joseph Thomas notes that three issues generated a lively debate on the Synod’s floor, namely, the place and role of women in the Church and in society, the growth of new movements in addition to approved lay associations, and lay ministries.<sup>30</sup>

The treatment of the vocation and mission of lay people in the first three chapters of the Apostolic Exhortation under the themes of the Church as mystery, communion, and mission follows closely the structure of John Paul II’s homily at the concluding mass of the 1987 Synod.<sup>31</sup> It is also aligned with the particular themes of the final report of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985,<sup>32</sup> whose importance is acknowledged by the Pope as “the preparation of the Synod on the Laity in 1987.”<sup>33</sup> This Extraordinary Synod aims to mediate, deepen, and foster “the application of the teaching of Vatican II 20 years after its conclusion,”<sup>34</sup> and endeavours to better understand the Church in “her vocation and mission and in her nature as both mystery and communion.”<sup>35</sup> It

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<sup>28</sup> Pope Paul VI opened the Synod to non-members and this practice of inviting non-members to be present at meetings of the Synod was confirmed by Pope John Paul II. See Jan Kerkhofs, “The Members of the Synod,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 49; Gerard O’Connell, “The Synod on the Laity: Dichotomies or Distinctions,” *The Month* (March 1988) 573.

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Thomas, “L’Exhortation ‘Les laïcs fidèles du Christ’: Plaidoyer pour l’engagement temporel,” *Etudes* (May 1989) 689.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390-2.

<sup>32</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 446-50.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390. From a procedural viewpoint, the Extraordinary Synod is different from the 1987 Synod in two aspects: no working document was prepared and the release of the Final Report marks the first time that a synod’s full report to the Pope has been made public.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, “Closing Address to the Synod,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 452.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, “Homily at Concluding Synod Mass,” *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 390.

affirms that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council’s documents.”<sup>36</sup> For Hermann Pottmeyer, *mysterium*, the first of the two ecclesiological motifs of this Synod refers to the theological aspect, and *communio*, the second, to the institutional aspect of the Church.<sup>37</sup> Avery Dulles also observes that the Extraordinary Synod’s final report attempts to “synthesise the Church’s apostolates of evangelisation, ecumenism, and social transformation in the light of an *ecclesiology of mystery and communion*.”<sup>38</sup> Joseph Komonchak goes further to note that Church as mystery was presented as “an antidote to the reductive anthropology ... and as a way of responding to the signs of a return to the sacred,”<sup>39</sup> and many Synod participants viewed the notion of the Church as communion as “holding the key to many of the contemporary problems of the Church.”<sup>40</sup> At this Extraordinary Synod, twenty-seven Fathers spoke on the mission of the laity under the theme of communion.<sup>41</sup> The structural similarity between the two post-synodal documents underlines the intimate link between these two Synods, rooting both of them in the fertile soil of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, Vatican II was a constant reference point at every stage of the Synod on the Laity process, and at least 97 of the 224 footnotes of the Apostolic Exhortation refer to the documents of the Council.<sup>42</sup> The Pope himself, in his introductory letter to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, stressed that the Second Vatican Council’s reminder contained in the theme chosen for the 1987 Synod “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World 20 Years After the Second Vatican Council”<sup>43</sup> was “not there by mere chance.”<sup>44</sup> Like the final

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<sup>36</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 448.

<sup>37</sup> Hermann Pottmeyer, “The Church as Mysterium and as Institution,” *Concilium* 1988 (1986) 99.

<sup>38</sup> Avery Dulles, “Catholic Ecclesiology since Vatican II,” *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 4.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Komonchak, “The Theological Debate,” *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 55.

<sup>40</sup> Gerard O’Connell, “Statements of the Synod Fathers,” *The Month* 19:4 (1986) 124.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Coughlan, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Hour of the Laity: Their Expanding Role: Exploring “Christifideles Laici”: The Pope’s Key Document on the Laity* (Newtown, NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1989) 7.

<sup>43</sup> The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, “The ‘*Instrumentum Laboris*’ or Working Paper for the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” no. 1, *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 1.

report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod which sees itself challenged to present the Church primarily as mystery, *Christifideles Laici* explores the baptismal dignity and identity of the lay faithful in the context of the Church as mystery right in its first chapter. Adopting this approach these two post-synodal documents simply follow the lead of *Lumen Gentium* which takes mystery as its starting point in exploring the nature of the Church.<sup>45</sup>

### 8.2.2 Critical Analysis of the Theology of the Laity in *Christifideles Laici*

A careful analysis of *Christifideles Laici* shows that the document moves on to use baptismal dignity as the framework to define the status of lay people, who are called to participate fully in the Church's life as communion and in its mission in the world. Our first observation is that the entire post-synodal Exhortation revolves around this theological motif. Indeed, in the theology of John Paul II, the dignity, identity, equality, vocation, communion, mission, spirituality, and secularity of the laity, spring from baptism. He repeatedly emphasises this point in several dense and explicit statements, often couched in forceful terms, some of which deserve to be quoted in full. For him, "it is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God."<sup>46</sup> He reinforces this idea again stating that "to grow in the knowledge of the richness of baptism and faith as well as to live it more fully" is the demanding task that awaits "all lay faithful and all Christians at every moment."<sup>47</sup> From this "one dignity flowing from baptism," the Pope affirms, "each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the church's mission."<sup>48</sup> In his view, this dignity as a Christian is

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<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to the World's Bishops on the Synod Working Paper," *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 20.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter I: The Mystery of the Church of *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 1-8.

<sup>46</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 58.

<sup>48</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15.

“the source of equality for all members of the church, guarantees and fosters the spirit of communion and fellowship, and at the same time becomes the hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful’s apostolate and mission.”<sup>49</sup> Echoing the thought of Vatican II and the Synod Fathers, he maintains that among the lay faithful “this one baptismal dignity” takes on a proper and particular manner of life, which is described as the secular character.<sup>50</sup> This secularity, or presence in the world, must be understood in the theological and ecclesiological sense, that is, “in light of God’s plan of salvation and in the context of the mystery of the church,” and not merely as “an anthropological and sociological reality.”<sup>51</sup> The world, he writes, is “the place and means for the lay faithful to fulfil their Christian vocation.”<sup>52</sup> Baptismal dignity, he emphasises again, is a dignity that “brings demands, the dignity of labourers called by the Lord to work in his vineyard.”<sup>53</sup>

From this *noblesse oblige*, or *honor/onus*, logic the Pope expounds the motif of baptismal dignity by emphasising its Trinitarian and ecclesiological dimension, which, in our view, is the predominant approach of the post-synodal Exhortation. First, he encourages all Christians including the lay faithful to be conscious of the fact that “through baptism they have received an extraordinary dignity,” the dignity of being “called to be children loved by the Father, members incorporated in Christ and his church, living and holy temples of the Spirit.”<sup>54</sup> He is convinced that this baptismal dignity, or newness of life, is “the basis of their participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ and of their vocation to holiness in love,” and in lay people, it is fulfilled through their secular character or presence in the world.<sup>55</sup> As members of the Church and sharers in the triple office of Christ, lay people participate in the mission of the Church, which is “concentrated and manifested in

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<sup>49</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

<sup>50</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

<sup>54</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 64.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*



evangelization.”<sup>56</sup> This supreme duty of evangelisation has two dimensions, *ad extra* as proclaiming the Gospel to the world, and *ad intra*, as playing an active part in the life and activity of the Church.<sup>57</sup> In his thinking, to grasp the “full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful” one has to consider that “the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity” is “the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>58</sup> The Pope hastens to add that “holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.”<sup>59</sup> Second, he highlights the communitarian and ecclesial dimension of the baptismal dignity by insisting that “only from inside the church’s mystery of communion is the ‘identity’ of the lay faithful made known and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the church and in the world be defined.”<sup>60</sup> Here his thought on the subject seems to be based on the Thomistic principle of *agere sequitur esse*, or action follows being, that is, identity and dignity.

The statements on the baptismal dignity of the lay faithful and its implications for Christian life show that John Paul II’s thought strongly reflects the views of Vatican II and the Synod participants. Indeed, according to the teachings of *Lumen Gentium* and the conciliar Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam Actuositatem* on the foundations of the lay apostolate, every lay person is “the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church,”<sup>61</sup> their right and duty to be apostles flows from their union with Christ the head, and being inserted “in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation,” they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself.<sup>62</sup> They live this apostolate “in faith, hope and charity” which is poured out by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all

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<sup>56</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 33.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 16.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no.3; *Lumen Gentium*, no.33.

members of the Church.<sup>63</sup> This charity, Christ's greatest commandment, "urges all Christians to work for the glory of God through the coming of his kingdom and for the communication of eternal life to all men."<sup>64</sup> With these passages Vatican II changed the way lay people are understood to share in the ministry and mission of the Church. Prior to the Council, Catholic Action was the dominant form of lay involvement. It was defined by Pope Pius XI, its initiator, as the participation, and by Pope Pius XII as the collaboration, in the apostolate of the hierarchy. With Vatican II, sacramental initiation becomes the theological and ecclesiological basis of the vocation and mission of the laity, and John Paul II simply continues and deepens this fundamental shift. In a similar vein, in the message to the entire Church issued at the conclusion of the Synod, the Synod Fathers declare that "all lay faithful have a dignity which they hold in common with clerics and religious, since there is only one people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>65</sup> For them, "this dignity comes from baptism, through which a person is incorporated into Christ and the community of the church and called to a life of holiness."<sup>66</sup> They continue to affirm that "whoever receives baptism, confirmation and the eucharist commits himself or herself to follow Christ and to witness to him with his or her whole life."<sup>67</sup> Like John Paul II, the Synod Fathers highlight both the Trinitarian and ecclesial dimension of the baptismal dignity which demands a holy life of witness from all the baptised Christians. Earlier, in the propositions drawn up at the end of their deliberations, the Synod Fathers reached similar conclusions. In their words, "all Christians, men and women, incorporated in Christ through baptism, enjoy the same Christian dignity and together form the people of God."<sup>68</sup> Through baptism, they are made disciples of Christ, "called to holiness, sharing in the eucharist and being marked by the gifts of the Holy Spirit," and, in their own way, make "the life and

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<sup>63</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Synod of Bishops, "Message to the People of God from the 1987 Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 17:22 (12 November 1987) 387.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Synod of Bishops, "The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 500.

mission of Christ present in this world to the honor of God and the salvation of human beings.”<sup>69</sup>

Like the concept of baptismal dignity, which is the basis and springboard for John Paul II’s reflection on the identity and role of the laity, the notion of mystery of communion, another pivotal point of *Christifideles Laici*, is decidedly Trinitarian and ecclesial. Our second observation therefore is that, for John Paul II, communion ecclesiology is the necessary context for understanding and explaining the vocation and mission of the laity.<sup>70</sup> The Pope emphasised this point in his annual address to the Roman Curia, barely two months after the conclusion of the Synod on the Laity, stating that the Synod’s positive results are due not only to its reaffirmation of the teachings of Vatican II, but “more so because of the emphasis on the ecclesiology of communion as a necessary context for situating the role of the laity in the church for the salvation of the world.”<sup>71</sup> The fundamental meaning of this complex, biblical word *communion*,<sup>72</sup> the Pope explains, refers to “the union with God brought about by

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<sup>69</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 500.

<sup>70</sup> Avery Dulles notes that John Paul II’s writings on the Church were “occasional rather than systematic” (*The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* [New York: Crossroad, 1999] 52). The Pope’s ecclesiological insights can be gleaned from two main sources: his book *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), and his talks given in general audiences between 10 July 1991 and 30 August 1995. See *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998).

<sup>71</sup> John Paul II, “Annual Address to the Roman Curia,” *Origins* 17 (28 January 1988) 575.

<sup>72</sup> Patrick Granfield notes that the word *communio* or *koinonia* occurs 19 times in the New Testament and 13 of these are in the Pauline writings (*Origins* 28:44 [22 April 1999] 757). Michael McDermott observes that, in the strict sense, no doctrine of *κοινωνία* is to be found in the Old Testament, and its full theological import is revealed in the Pauline letters “as that most intimate union of man with God and his fellow-men accomplished through Christ that constitutes final salvation” (“The Biblical doctrine of KOINΩNIA,” *Biblischer Zeitschrift* 19 [1975] 65). For him, community, participation, contribution, collection, and communion are some possible ways of translating *κοινωνία*, and in Paul’s writings, “there is a fullness of significance in almost every occurrence of this word,” and “it is often impossible to limit it to a single clear-cut meaning” (*ibid.*, 232). Schuyler Brown contends that while *koinonia* is attributed to Christians in the New Testament, it is “used abstractly (‘participation’ or ‘fellowship’), not concretely (‘community’), and consequently a direct identification between *koinonia* and *ekklesia* is impossible.” See “Koinonia as the Basis of New Testament Ecclesiology,” *One in Christ* 12 (1976) 159. Brown also warns that today we tend to use the word communion in the concrete sense of a body of Christians having one common faith and discipline, e.g., the Anglican communion, and we must be careful not to read this meaning of communion back into *koinonia*. *Ibid.*, see also Walter Kasper, “Church as Communio,” *New Blackfriars* 74:871 (May 1993) 236. For Hans Urs von Balthasar, “*Com-munio*,” a combination of two Latin words: *munire*, to surround with a rampart and *moenia*, city walls, means “community in the concrete, expressive sense of being brought together into a common fortification” and “into a common achievement, task, administration, which at the same time

Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>73</sup> Such communion, he adds, is “present in the Word of God and in the sacraments,” and “baptism is the door and foundation of communion in the church.”<sup>74</sup> He immediately adds that “the body of Christ in the holy eucharist sacramentalizes this communion,” and “the eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life.”<sup>75</sup> Recalling the words of Pope Paul VI spoken at a general audience on the day after the close of Vatican II, he speaks of the Church as *sanctorum communio*, the communion of saints, which refers to “a double, life-giving participation: the incorporation of Christians into the life of Christ and the communication of that life of charity to the entire body of the faithful in this world and the next, union with Christ and in Christ, and unity among Christians in the church.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, ecclesial communion has two inseparable dimensions, vertical and horizontal, “the communion of each Christian with Christ and the communion of all Christians with one another.”<sup>77</sup> This communion, the Pope affirms, is “the very mystery of the church.”<sup>78</sup>

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can mean mutual satisfaction, gift, grace” (“*Communio*,” *Communio* 10:2 [Summer 1983] 198; excerpted from “*Communio* - a Programme,” *International Catholic Review*, 1:1 [1972] 3-12).

<sup>73</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19; this text was taken from Paul VI’s address in Italian: “Chiesa vuol dire comunione dei sancti. E comunione dei sancti vuol dire una duplice partecipazione vitale: la incorporazione dei cristiani nella vita di Cristo, e la circolazione della medesima carità in tutta la compagine dei fedeli, in questo mondo e nell’altro. Unione a Cristo ed in Cristo; e unione fra i cristiani, nella Chiesa.” (“La Chiesa è una comunione,” [General Audience, 8 June 1966], *Insegnamenti* IV [Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1966] 794). Based on Joseph Hainz’s identification of two meanings in Saint Paul’s concept of *koinonia*: “Community through participation” or, “community with someone through common participation in something,” H.-J. Klauck argues that “the expression *tōn hagiōn koinōnia* [communion of saints] might contain both ideas of “community with others, and participation in the elements of the Lord’s Supper,” and there is a causal relationship between them: “participation in the sacrament establishes community” (“Eucharist and Church Community in Paul,” *Theology Digest* 35:1 [Spring 1988] 19). Avery Dulles shares this view suggesting that the term *communio sanctorum* in the Apostles’ Creed seems to have meant “‘participation in holy things’, rather than ‘communion of saints’,” and notes that today it suggests “Holy Communion, the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ” (“The Church as Communion,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, edited by Bradley Nassif, [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996] 126).

<sup>77</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19. Elsewhere the Pope describes ecclesial communion as “a ‘participated theonomy’ which draws us into the communion of Trinitarian love in such a way that our full humanity is fulfilled at the same time that it is transcended.” J. Augustine Di Noia, “Ecclesiology of Communion and Catholic Higher Education,” *Origins* 29:17 (7 October 1999) 269.

<sup>78</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 18, 64.

Here John Paul II faithfully retrieves the teachings of both Vatican II and the 1985 Synod of Bishops. Indeed, right in its first paragraph *Lumen Gentium* claims that the Church as mystery, lived as the people of God, is the sign and instrument of a communion to which the whole human family is called.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, in their final report, the 1985 Synod Fathers state that communion is “a matter of communion with God through Jesus Christ in the sacraments,” “baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the church,” and “the communion of the eucharistic body of Christ signifies and produces, that is, builds up, the intimate communion of all the faithful in the body of Christ which is the church.”<sup>80</sup> Dennis M. Doyle notes that the term communion, considered by some to be “the single most important idea leading to Vatican II,” did not come into wide use after Vatican II, but communion ecclesiology as a theological approach has started much earlier, and, despite being “a diverse and many-layered idea whose historical roots are complex,” tends to be associated with Johann Adam Möhler’s *Die Einheit in der Kirche* (1985).<sup>81</sup> Sharing this view, Walter

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<sup>79</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. The Preliminary Explanatory Note to the third chapter of *Lumen Gentium* says that the idea of communion is “not to be understood as some vague sort of *good will*, but as *something organic* which calls for a juridical structure as well as being enkindled by charity” (“*Lumen Gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, new rev. ed., edited by Austin Flannery [Northport, New York: Costello Publishing] 425). For Walter Kasper, *Lumen Gentium* provides a Trinitarian description of the mystery of the Church as the mystery of *communio*: “*communio* means participation in the divine life to which we are called by the eternal father”; *communio*, “the aim of the entire history of salvation is uniquely personified in history through Jesus Christ;” and “what happens once and for all in Jesus Christ is continued and spread throughout the world through the Holy Spirit, who lives within the Church and the hearts of the faithful” (“Church as *Communio*,” *New Blackfriars* 74:871 [May 1993] 234-5). Hermann Pottmeyer notes that Vatican II applies the concept of communion to all areas of Church’s life: “it is a *communio fidelium* in the people of God, *communio hierarchica* in the college of bishops, *communio ecclesiarum* in the whole Church; it is unity in diversity, and *communio non plena* with the separated churches” (“The Church as *Mysterium* and as *Institution*,” *Concilium* 188 [1986] 104).

<sup>80</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 448.

<sup>81</sup> Dennis M. Doyle, “Communion Ecclesiology and the Silencing of Boff,” *America* (12 September 1992) 140; Dennis Doyle, “Möhler, Schleiermacher, the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996) 467-8; see also Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church, or the Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers in the First Three Centuries*, edited and translated with an introduction, addenda, and appendixes by Peter C. Erb (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1996). According to Domenico Spada, “Möhler’s central idea is that the Church is essentially the work of the Holy Spirit, who is its soul, its interior force, urging the faithful to confession of the Truth and to a life of communion in love” (“The Laity and their Mission in the Development of Modern Theology,” *The Laity Today* 26 [1999] 20). To correct this pneumatological bias in interpreting the Church, in his later work *Symbolik* [Symbolism], first appeared in 1832, Möhler emphasises the Christological dimension of the Church, which is seen as a continued incarnation. Michael J. Himes notes that Möhler’s Christological focus is the incarnation, not the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (“Divinizing the Church: Strauss and Barth on Möhler’s Ecclesiology,”

Kasper agrees that the basic meaning of *koinonia/communio* was first rediscovered by the Catholic Tübingen theologians, especially Möhler, but for him, the real breakthrough came with *Corpus Mysticum*, a 1943 book by Henri de Lubac, and those insights “were made ecumenically fertile by Yves Congar.”<sup>82</sup> In the same vein, George Tavard observes that the idea of the Church as communion, systematically explored by Jérôme Hamer in his work, *The Church is a Communion*, published in 1962, on the eve of Vatican II, has emerged as the dominant theme of post-Vatican II ecclesiology.<sup>83</sup> Hamer defines the Church as “the mystical body of Christ, that is to say a communion which is at once inward and external, the life of union with Christ and established (caused) by the economy of Christ’s mediation.”<sup>84</sup> His conclusion is that the specific and permanent form of the unity of the Church is communion, and that is the book’s answer to the single question it sets out to explore: “What is the principle of the Church’s unity?”<sup>85</sup> Continuing this line of thought, but with more ecumenical sensitivity, French Canadian ecclesiologist J.-M. R. Tillard develops an ecclesiology based on the concept of communion using biblical and patristic sources. His thesis is that the Church is “the *Church of Churches*,” and “understood in its full context, it is the *communion of communions*, appearing as a *communion* of local Churches, spread throughout the world, each one itself being a *communion* of the baptized, gathered together into communities by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of their baptism, for the Eucharistic celebration.”<sup>86</sup> For him, the Church exists as communion,

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*The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by D.J. Dietrich and M.J. Himes, [New York: Crossroad, 1997] 105).

<sup>82</sup> Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004) 57-8; For Congar, “the underlying meaning of *koinonia*, communion, is very close to *metoché*, participation” (“The Conciliar Structure or Regime of the Church,” *Concilium* 167 [1983] 3).

<sup>83</sup> George H. Tavard, “Tradition as Koinonia in Historical Perspective,” *One in Christ* 24:2 (1988) 97. Walter Kasper thinks that *communio* has emerged, in a totally unplanned way, “as the key term and the common denominator for the different visions of Christian unity) (“Ecumenism: the Way Ahead,” *The Tablet* [24 May 2003] 34). Patrick Granfield notes that “Vatican II used the term ‘communio’ over one hundred times with a variety of meanings” with most significant usages in *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Unitatis Reintegratio* (“The Collegiality Debate,” in *Church and Theology: Essays in Memory of Carl J. Peter*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995] 93).

<sup>84</sup> Jerome Hamer, *The Church is a Communion*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964) 92.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, 9.

<sup>86</sup> J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 29. For Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, “the future of ecumenism is an ecclesiology of communion in all its dimensions” (quoted by Eric W. Gritsch, “Justification by Faith

and this communion is not a secondary characteristic of Church's identity, but is essential to it.<sup>87</sup> In another seminal work, Tillard takes the *ephapax* of Pentecost as the departure point to relate the communion of the local Church to the universal Church, suggesting that the first Church of Jerusalem is the mother Church of all others.<sup>88</sup> Patrick Granfield notes that "*koinonia* brings together two essential qualities of the Church - its locality and universality - as coherent aspects of one and the same reality."<sup>89</sup> Discussing the use of models in ecclesiology John Fuellenbach considers Vatican II's communion ecclesiology as a "*paradigm shift*" in the understanding of the Church compared to "the dominant ecclesiology that prevailed in the century before the council."<sup>90</sup> Walter Kasper goes much further in asserting that "for the Church, there is only one way into the future: the way pointed by the council, the full implementation of the council and its communion ecclesiology. This is the way which God's Spirit has shown us."<sup>91</sup> As an active participant at Vatican II, which was largely a Council about the Church, John Paul II has followed *Lumen Gentium's* vision of the Church as a "communion of life, love and truth," the instrument for the

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and Ecclesial Communion: Pointers from the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue," in *Church and Theology: Essays in Memory of Carl J. Peter*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995] 161); see also Johannes Willebrands, "Vatican II's Ecclesiology of Communion," *Origins* 17:2 (28 May 1987) 32.

<sup>87</sup> J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 29, 53. Tillard notes that in *Church of Churches* he describes "the structure of God's Church," and in "the second volume" of his ecclesiology of communion, he reflects more deeply on "the living reality of grace for which this structure exists" (*Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by Madeleine Beaumont [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2001] ix-x).

<sup>88</sup> J.-M. R. Tillard, *L'Eglise Locale* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1995). For Hervé Legrand, the Church was born universal at Pentecost. See "Inverser Babel, mission de l'Eglise," *Spiritus* 43 (1970) 334; cited by Joseph Komonchak, "The Church Universal as the Communion of Local Churches," *Concilium* 146 [June 1982] 32. Raymond E. Brown concurs with this view stating that "any thesis that would give priority to the local regional church runs up against the indication in Acts that at one time the local community of Jerusalem was the whole Church" ("New Testament Background for the Concept of the Local Church," *CTSA Proceedings* 36 [1981] 1-4). The relationship between the universal Church and the local Church would later become the topic of an interesting debate between two theologian cardinals; see Walter Kasper, "On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger," *America* (23-30 April 2001) 8-14; and Joseph Ratzinger, "The Local Church and the Universal Church," *America* (19 November 2001) 7-11.

<sup>89</sup> Patrick Granfield, "Realization of Communion," *The Jurist* (49 (1989) 450.

<sup>90</sup> John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 147.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 150.

salvation of all,<sup>92</sup> or as a “community of faith, hope and charity,” a visible organisation through which Christ communicates truth and grace to humankind.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, according to Avery Dulles, while John Paul II’s ecclesiology can be characterised in terms of five ecclesiological models: “the church as mystical communion, institution, sacrament, herald and servant,” his preferred category for ecclesiology is that of communion.<sup>94</sup> However, the Pope’s preferred use of the phrase “mystery of communion”<sup>95</sup> and his treatment of the concepts of mystery and communion show that for him they are simply two aspects of the same reality even though in *Christifideles Laici* they are discussed in different chapters, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 respectively, and often referred to as two distinct ecclesiological motifs by prominent theologians such as Dulles, Komonchak, and Pottmeyer.<sup>96</sup> The reality of the Church as communion, he writes, is “the integrating aspect, indeed the central content of the ‘mystery’, or rather, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity.”<sup>97</sup> From this perspective the Pope affirms that the Church as mystery of communion is the living context for grasping the identity, mission, and responsibility of the lay faithful.<sup>98</sup> Elaborating on this point, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, head of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, states that “the principle of *Christifideles Laici* is the

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<sup>92</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

<sup>93</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8. Francis A. Sullivan considers this passage “the most profoundly theological article in the whole constitution on the church” as it describes both the divine and human element of the Church (*The Church We Believe in: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* [New York, N.J.: Paulist, 1988] 15).

<sup>94</sup> Avery Dulles, “The Ecclesiology of John Paul II,” *Origins* 28:44 (22 April 1999) 759. In an address to the U.S. Bishops in 1987, the Pope affirms that “at the heart of the church’s self-understanding is the notion of *communio*” (Address to the U.S. Bishops,” *Origins* 17:16 [1 October 1987] 257).

<sup>95</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 18, 55, 64.

<sup>96</sup> Avery Dulles, “Catholic Ecclesiology since Vatican II,” *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 4; Joseph Komonchak, “The Theological Debate,” *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 55, and “The Church: God’s Gift and Our Task,” *Origins* 16:42 (2 April 1987) 735; Hermann Pottmeyer, “The Church as Mysterium and as Institution,” *Concilium* 188 (1986) 99.

<sup>97</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 19.

<sup>98</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 18. Addressing the Congress of Catholic Laity in 2000 the Pope affirms that “the Church is a mystery of communion, which originates in the life of the Blessed Trinity. She is the Mystical Body of Christ. She is the People of God who, made one by the same faith, hope and charity, journey through history to their definitive homeland in heaven.” See “Message of His Holiness John Paul II,” in *The Congress of Catholic Laity: Rome 2000*, edited by the Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) 5. Therefore, he stresses that “it is important to reawaken in the entire People of God a true *sensus Ecclesiae*, along with a deep awareness of being Church, that is, a mystery of communion.” Ibid.



presentation of the lay faithful's vocation and mission within an ecclesiology of communion, which was at the heart of the council and reposed by the 1985 extraordinary synod."<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, in the post-synodal Exhortation, John Paul II explains that lay Christians' share in the threefold mission of Christ is derived from the Church communion, and their participation has to be "lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself."<sup>100</sup> This communion, in his view, is "the first great sign in the world of the presence of Christ," and it "promotes and stimulates the proper apostolic and missionary action of the church."<sup>101</sup> The lay faithful, together with the clergy and religious, are all labourers in the vineyard, and they are at the same time "the goal and subjects of church communion as well as of participation in the mission of salvation."<sup>102</sup> In the Church communion, their life has a profound meaning, that of "living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love."<sup>103</sup> Here, the Pope, recalling Saint Paul's image of the mystical body of Christ, describes ecclesial communion as an "organic" communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body.<sup>104</sup> It is characterised by "a diversity and complementarity of vocations and states of life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities," which exist "in communion and on behalf of communion."<sup>105</sup> Reflecting on the co-responsibility of the lay faithful in the Church as mission the Pope highlights the intimate link between communion and mission: "Communion and mission are profoundly connected to each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission and mission is

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<sup>99</sup> Eduardo Pironio, "The Laity as Agents of Evangelization," *Origins* 18:42 (30 March 1989) 699.

<sup>100</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 14.

<sup>101</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 64, 31.

<sup>102</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 55.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

accomplished in communion.”<sup>106</sup> As vocation, communion, and mission are the main concepts of the Apostolic Exhortation, it is worthwhile to recall a helpful distinction made by *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Vatican II’s Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, and the *Instrumentum Laboris*. According to this Decree, the apostolate of the laity is derived from their very vocation as a Christian.<sup>107</sup> The Working Paper expands this idea further: “Vocation is broader than mission because it is composed of both a call to *communio* and a call to mission. *Communio* is the fundamental aspect destined to endure forever. Mission, on the other hand, is a consequence of this call and is limited to an earthly existence.”<sup>108</sup>

John Paul II’s explication of the identity, vocation and mission of the laity from the perspective of the Church as communion raises a question, which, we believe, has not explicitly been raised before, and that is: would the role and ministry of the laity be different from what was presented in *Christifideles Laici* had the Pope proceeded from the conciliar framework of the Church as the people of God? To adequately address this question one has to consider it in the context of the post-conciliar debate about the very nature of the Church. Indeed, after Vatican II, especially as a result of the accent on the topic of “The People of God” in Chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*, there was a commonly held view that the dominant image of the Church is that of the people of God. José Comblin stresses this point arguing that “Vatican II explicitly tried to place the people of God before the theme of the Body of Christ as more all-embracing and more fundamental.”<sup>109</sup> Hermann Pottmeyer notes that “the basic idea followed in *Lumen Gentium* is the church as the people of God on pilgrimage; the basic idea in *Gaudium et Spes* is the church as the universal sacrament of salvation.”<sup>110</sup> However, the final report of the 1985 Synod of Bishops changed this paradigm by declaring that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and

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<sup>106</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 32.

<sup>107</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 1.

<sup>108</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, “The ‘Instrumentum Laboris’ or Working Paper for the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” no. 14, *Origins* 17:1 (21 May 1987) 7.

<sup>109</sup> José Comblin, *People of God*, edited and translated by Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 53.

<sup>110</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Book, 1998) 111.

fundamental idea of the council's documents."<sup>111</sup> Since the release of this report several prominent theologians have pointed out this ecclesiological shift from the expression of the Church as the people of God to the Church as communion. Referring to the 1985 Synod, Jean-Marie Tillard speaks of the "displacement of the accent on the Church as People of God,"<sup>112</sup> and Aloísio Lorscheider mentions a fear in some quarters that the image of the people of God might degenerate into a merely democratic view of the Church.<sup>113</sup> Joseph Komonchak notes that the 1985 Synod of Bishops "almost completely neglects the idea of People of God in favor of the idea of communion,"<sup>114</sup> and that the sole reference to the term in the final report is its alleged misuse, a fact that he considers to be "an astounding development for a document which warns against partial and selective readings of the Council's texts."<sup>115</sup> For Avery Dulles, "this gravitation to the concept of communion is surprising since the Church is never called a communion in Scripture, nor is it so called in the documents of any ecumenical council of the Catholic Church," and this includes Vatican II.<sup>116</sup> In his view, the 1985 Synod seems to have made "a deliberative effort to oust 'People of God' from its position of primacy," and its preferred use of the concept of communion is due to the belief that it is not "amenable to sociological reduction, and seems "conducive to internal unity and peace."<sup>117</sup> Hermann Pottmeyer notes that "the charges made against the phrase *people of God* were also made against *communio* ecclesiology," and "a number of theologians expressed reserve concerning *communio* ecclesiology and demanded a return to *people of God* as the ecclesiological

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<sup>111</sup> Synod of Bishops, "The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 15:27 (19 December 1985) 448.

<sup>112</sup> Jean-Marie Tillard, "Final Report of the Last Synod," *Concilium* 188 (1986) 67.

<sup>113</sup> Aloísio Lorscheider, "The Extraordinary Synod in Light of Vatican II Twenty Years Later," *Concilium* 188 (1986) 81.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Komonchak, "Concepts of Communion. Past and Present," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 16 (1995) 335.

<sup>115</sup> Joseph Komonchak, "The Theological Debate," *Concilium* 188 (1986) 55-6.

<sup>116</sup> Avery Dulles, "The Church as Communion," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, edited by Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 127.

<sup>117</sup> Avery Dulles, "The Church as Communion," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, edited by Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 128.

catchword.”<sup>118</sup> Reviewing this debate, Komonchak observes that some interpreters have misunderstood the connection between Chapter 1 of *Lumen Gentium* on the mystery of the Church and Chapter 2 on the people of God, and have consequently commented on them as if one had to choose between body of Christ and people of God, or between people of God and communion.<sup>119</sup> For him, the first chapter considers the Church “from creation in the plan of God until its fulfilment in heaven,” and the second chapter discusses “the same mystery in the time between the ascension and the Parousia,” or the mystery of the Church as “lived out in history,” a “‘communion of life, charity, and truth,’ that is ‘the messianic people’ which God uses as the instrument of salvation, ‘the visible sacrament of saving unity’.”<sup>120</sup> Walter Kasper contends that a detailed analysis reveals that images and concepts used to describe the nature of the Church in Vatican II documents, such as “Church as People of God, as Body of Christ, as Temple of the Holy Spirit and as Sacrament, i.e., sign and instrument of unity,” are “ultimately based on, and interpreted through, the understanding of the Church as *communio*.”<sup>121</sup> The unity of the Church, he writes, is “a *communio*-unity,” and as “*communio*-unity she is the concrete, sacramental sign and representation of the trinitarian mystery, an icon of the Trinity.”<sup>122</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also insists that the concept of communion, “a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology,” must be “integrated with the concepts of people of God and body of Christ,” and “the relationship between the church as communion and the church as sacrament” has to be given due

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<sup>118</sup> Hermann Pottmeyer, “The Actualization of Vatican II,” *Theology Digest* 49:2 (Summer 2002) 148-9.

<sup>119</sup> Joseph Komonchak, “Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” *Origins* 28:44 (22 April 1999) 764.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph Komonchak, “Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” *Origins* 28:44 (22 April 1999) 764; see also “Concepts of Communion. Past and Present,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 16 (1995) 335. In explaining the structure of *Lumen Gentium*, Joseph A. Komonchak further stresses that “a single mystery was being unfolded, first in its transcendent and then in its historical dimensions, and the commission had broken the material up into two chapters simply because a single chapter would be too long” (“The Significance of Vatican II for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 77).

<sup>121</sup> Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004) 58.

<sup>122</sup> Walter Kasper, “The Church as Sacrament of Unity,” *Communio* 10 (1987) 8-9.

importance.<sup>123</sup> In light of the intrinsic connection between communion and people of God, impressively argued by Joseph Komonchak, Hermann Pottmeyer, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the need for John Paul II to refer to the teachings of Vatican II,<sup>124</sup> we believe that if the Pope had developed his theology of the laity from the image of the Church as people of God, he would have arrived at similar conclusions.<sup>125</sup>

In the final appeal made at the conclusion of the Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope links two concepts of baptismal dignity and mystery of communion together. First, he asks all Christians to be aware of “a commonly shared Christian dignity.”<sup>126</sup> Second, he encourages them to be always mindful of “what it means to be members of the church of Jesus Christ, participants in her mystery of communion and in her dynamism in mission and the apostolate.”<sup>127</sup> For him, this “ecclesial consciousness” is “a sense of belonging to the mystery of church communion,” and it solicits a free and generous response from all Christians.<sup>128</sup> As “the gift of Christ and his Spirit,” communion is destined for all people.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” *Origins* 22:7 (25 June 1992) 108.

<sup>124</sup> For example, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II considers Chapter Five of *Lumen Gentium* as the normative text of the magisterial teaching on the Church (“Apostolic Letter ‘*Novo Millennio Ineunte*’ for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000,” no. 30, *Origins* 30:31 [18 January 2001] 499). Earlier, in another Apostolic Letter, he insists that “the best preparation for the new millennium ... can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church” (“*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*,” no. 20, *Origins* 24:24 [24 November 1994] 407). Joseph Thomas considers that “au plan théologique, le synode ne pouvait que reprendre les renseignements du concile Vatican II” (“L’Exhortation ‘Les laïcs fidèles du Christ’: Plaidoyer pour l’engagement temporel,” *Etudes* [May 1989] 689).

<sup>125</sup> It is instructive to recall that in the Bull of Promulgation of the 1983 Codex, John Paul II declares that “foremost among the elements which express the true and authentic image of the Church are: the teaching whereby the Church is presented as the people of God...; the further teaching which portrays the Church as a communion...; likewise, the teaching by which all members of the People of God share, each in their own measure, in the threefold priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.” See “Apostolic Constitution,” in *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation*, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Canon Law Society (London: HarperCollins, 1997) xv.

<sup>126</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 64.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 31-32.

In our view, one of the guiding principles of John Paul II's reflection on baptismal dignity and mystery of communion, and his use of these themes as the basis for understanding and explaining the vocation and mission of lay people, is his conviction that ecclesial communion is both a gift and a task. He explicitly refers to this idea by affirming that the Church communion is "a great gift, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility."<sup>130</sup> His emphasis on the twin notions of baptismal dignity and mystery of communion in the post-synodal documentation represents a deepening of, and a progression from, the teachings of Vatican II. These concepts are intimately connected, providing both the defining basis of, and the operating context for, the life, vocation, and mission of lay Christians. They also lead us to contend that at the very centre of his theology of the laity is the belief that lay people's identity, vocation, and mission are simply different dimensions or aspects of the same reality. One should not speak of several theologies of the laity in the Pope's vast and varied corpus. Rather, in this Exhortation and his other writings, there is only one essential theological treatment of the dignity, identity, and role of the lay faithful. In the Church, which is at the same time communion, missionary, and holy by nature,<sup>131</sup> lay people are called to discover and live their own vocation and mission. Our third observation is that, like *Lumen Gentium*, the universal call to holiness lies at the heart of *Christifideles Laici*. As the fullest expression of communion, it is bound intrinsically to the identity, mission, spirituality, and secularity of lay people.

The post-synodal Exhortation discusses the call to holiness in sections 16 and 17. However, to fully appreciate the richness of its teachings, the entire document has to be taken into account. As a whole, *Christifideles Laici* has a strong spiritual and pastoral orientation. It provides a program of spirituality for lay people aiming to link doctrine and life. This emphasis on unity of life has baptismal identity as the basis, and missionary communion as its content. Section 16 examines the theological foundation of the call to holiness, and section 17 insists that lay people have to live

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<sup>130</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

<sup>131</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 32.

this vocation in the world, that is, there should be no dichotomy or conflict between their Christian life and their presence in the world. Philippe Delhay identifies four major themes in these two sections: holiness as a fundamental and undeniable demand flowing from the mystery of the Church; charity, love of God and love of neighbours, as the essence of Christian holiness; holiness as an essential element of the baptismal, sacramental life, and as a constitutive element of the dignity and mission of Christians, and finally, holiness as the obligation for all Christians, based on the idea of following and imitating Christ.<sup>132</sup>

In section 16, John Paul II defines the call to holiness, stresses its importance in Christian life, and explains its Trinitarian, Christological, and Pneumatological foundation as well as its universal character. The vocation to holiness, understood as “the perfection of charity” is “the prime and fundamental vocation” of the lay faithful that “the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>133</sup> It is a universal and common call, rooted in baptism, and addressed to all members of the Church.<sup>134</sup> Finally, it is a requirement “to follow and imitate Jesus Christ,” and a vocation to lead a holy life according to the Spirit.<sup>135</sup> Here the Pope implicitly links the concept of holiness with the baptismal dignity by affirming that holiness is “the greatest dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.”<sup>136</sup>

In section 17, following the propositions of the Synod Fathers, the Pope reflects on the theme of holiness but with an emphasis on the unity of life and the need to live out this holiness in the midst of the world.<sup>137</sup> This unity of life of lay Christians is of “the greatest importance,” and implies a life lived according to the Spirit, which “expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their

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<sup>132</sup> Philippe Delhay, “Les Grandes Leçons du Synode de 1987: Guide de lecture de l’Exhortation Apostolique Post-Synodale *Christifideles Laïci*,” *Esprit et Vie* [Part 1] 22 (1 June 1989) 329.

<sup>133</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 16.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Synod of Bishops, “The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 501.

participation in earthly activities.”<sup>138</sup> The vocation to holiness is “an essential and inseparable element of the new life of baptism, and therefore an element which determines their dignity.”<sup>139</sup> Lay people have to recognise and live this vocation as “an undeniable and demanding obligation.”<sup>140</sup> Their holiness is derived from their participation in the Church’s holiness, and represents “their first and fundamental contribution to the building of the church herself, who is the ‘communion of saints’.”<sup>141</sup> It is “intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the church and in the world.”<sup>142</sup> Therefore, it must be considered as “a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the church.”<sup>143</sup> The church’s holiness, the Pope concludes, is “the hidden source and the infallible measure of the works of the apostolate and of the missionary effort.”<sup>144</sup> The idea of this section is that Christian holiness must be integrated in the very activities of daily life, and that there should be no conflict or dualism between a life of holiness and the full participation in the world.<sup>145</sup>

In the last part of his Exhortation where he discusses the variety of vocations and the formation of the lay faithful, the Pope returns to this theme, but from a different perspective, calling for a “total integrated formation for living an integrated life.”<sup>146</sup> For him, the fundamental objective of the formation of lay people is “an ever-clearer discovery of one’s vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil

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<sup>138</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> To underscore the possibility of holiness in lay life, the Pope beatified two laymen, Lorenzo Ruiz (18 October 1987) and Giuseppe Moscati (25 October 1987), while the Synod on the Laity was in session. See “Annual Address to the Roman Curia,” *Origins* 17 (28 January 1988) 575.

<sup>146</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 59-60.



one's mission."<sup>147</sup> This vocation is to live out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love.<sup>148</sup> It requires that lay people remain attached to the vine, which is Jesus Christ, to continually grow in spiritual maturation.<sup>149</sup> In a Christian spirituality, which bears its fruit, there is a unity of life, and every activity, every situation, and every responsibility of the lay faithful become "occasions ordained by providence for a 'continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity'."<sup>150</sup>

John Paul II also frequently reflects on the topic of holiness in other addresses and writings. In 1979, a year into his pontificate, he declared that every lay Christian is "an extraordinary work of God's grace and is called to the heights of holiness."<sup>151</sup> Lay people, according to the Pope, share in the holiness of the Church, and this "ontological" sharing is translated into an individual ethical commitment to sanctification.<sup>152</sup> In a homily at the World Youth Day in Paris in 1997, he expatiates on the linkage between baptism and holiness, describing baptism as "the most beautiful of God's gifts," and "the sign that God has joined us on our journey, that he makes our existence more beautiful and that he transforms our history into a history of holiness."<sup>153</sup> In the inspiring Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, his message for the Church at the beginning of the third millennium, he explains that holiness is "the dimension which expresses best the mystery of the church."<sup>154</sup> For him, the rediscovery of the Church as mystery and as people of God goes hand in hand with

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<sup>147</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 57.

<sup>148</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 58.

<sup>149</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 57.

<sup>150</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 59.

<sup>151</sup> John Paul II, "Homily in Limerick: The Task of the Modern Generation," 1 October 1979, *Origins* 9 (1979) 324-6.

<sup>152</sup> John Paul II, *Agenda for the Third Millennium*, translated by Alan Neame (London: Fount, 1996) 46.

<sup>153</sup> John Paul II, "Do You Know What Baptism Does to You?" *Origins* 27:12 (4 September 1997) 187-8.

<sup>154</sup> John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter 'Novo Millennio Ineunte' for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000," no. 7, *Origins* 30:31 (18 January 2001) 492.

the rediscovery of holiness.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, all pastoral initiatives, he insists, “must be set in relation to holiness.”<sup>156</sup> He deepens his earlier Trinitarian explanation of the concept of holiness by affirming that, through baptism, Christians enter into “the holiness of God himself, being incorporated into Christ and made a dwelling place of his Spirit.”<sup>157</sup> He returns to the gift/task dynamics and states that holiness is not only a gift to all believers, but also a task, intrinsic and essential to Christian discipleship.<sup>158</sup> For every member of the Church, this task is personal sanctification, and this “radicalism of holiness in accordance with the Spirit of the evangelical counsels” is incumbent on all Christians and intimately linked to the credibility of the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>159</sup> Here again we find a strong linkage between *Christifideles Laici* and the teachings of Vatican II, in particular *Lumen Gentium*, which offers the clearest statements of a paradigm shift in the understanding of holiness. Holiness, that is, perfection of charity, is now mandatory and accessible for all members of the Church, of any status of life and occupation, and not just the elite, who leave the secular world in pursuit of the sacred. The universal call to holiness occupies a central place in both *Christifideles Laici* and *Lumen Gentium*.

In chapter five of the Constitution on the Church, holiness is articulated as a living reality, an essential element of ecclesial life, and the fullest expression of the Church’s mystery and communion. All Christians, “in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love.”<sup>160</sup> All are

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<sup>155</sup> John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter ‘*Novo Millennio Ineunte*’ for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000,” no. 30, *Origins* 30:31 (18 January 2001) 499.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> John Paul II, “Holiness and the Credibility of the Church’s Proclamation: ‘*Ad Limina*’ Address to Bishops from California, Nevada and Hawai,” *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004) 41; see also John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter ‘*Novo Millennio Ineunte*’ for the Closing of the Jubilee of the Year 2000,” no. 31, *Origins* 30:31 (18 January 2001) 499-500.

<sup>158</sup> John Paul II, “Holiness and the Credibility of the Church’s Proclamation: ‘*Ad Limina*’ Address to Bishops from California, Nevada and Hawai,” *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004) 41.

<sup>159</sup> John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Pastores Gregis*’,” no. 18, *Origins* 33:22 (6 November 2003) 364; “Holiness and the Credibility of the Church’s Proclamation: ‘*Ad Limina*’ Address to Bishops from California, Nevada and Hawai,” *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004) 41.

<sup>160</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 39.

“invited and obliged to holiness and the perfection of their own state of life.”<sup>161</sup>

*Lumen Gentium* gives greater recognition to the holiness of the Church in marriage and in celibacy, through choices made at home and in the workplace, and also in the whole range of relationships. Holiness and charity are a gift, and this Trinitarian gift must be cultivated by acting “under God’s Spirit,” “obeying the Father’s voice,” and following “Christ, poor, humble and cross-bearing.”<sup>162</sup> It is to be sought after in the meditation of the word of God, the cooperation with the divine, the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist, the prayer, self-denial, service, and the practice of all virtues.<sup>163</sup> Above all else Christian holiness entails living in faith, hope and charity, a witness of life radically exemplified to an extraordinary degree in the lives of saints and martyrs.<sup>164</sup> Our third observation can now be reformulated as follows: holiness is a participation in the Trinitarian life, and has to do with who we are, how we live, and what we do in the Church and in the world. This reformulation touches on one of the thorniest issues concerning lay people: the definition or description of Christian laity.<sup>165</sup> Our fourth and last observation is that John Paul II has at times provided a description of the lay faithful which is more positive than that proposed by Vatican II, and has indeed opened the avenue for an identification between the lay faithful and the Christian while maintaining the functional differentiation between laity and clergy by stressing the concept of secular character.

Section nine of the post-synodal document summarises his view on the identity of the lay faithful.<sup>166</sup> First, it notes that the Synod Fathers have identified a need for a better

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<sup>161</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 42.

<sup>162</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 41.

<sup>163</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 41-2.

<sup>164</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 41.

<sup>165</sup> Yves Congar considers that a positive definition of the laity is very difficult, even impossible. See “The Laity,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller, (Notre Dame, Ind.: 1966) 241. A. Glorieux, Secretary of the Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity at the time of the Second Vatican Council, recalls that the Commission has used the word “faithful” to mean any baptised person, and “layperson” to refer to one who is not a religious or a cleric; see footnote 93 in Jan Grootaers, “The Drama Continues Between the Acts: The ‘Second Preparation’ and its Opponents,” in *History of Vatican I, vol. 2: The Formation of the Council’s Identity: First Period and Intercession October 1962-September 1963*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo, English version edited by Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997) 407.

<sup>166</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9.

clarification of the positive description of the Christian laity through a deeper exploration of Vatican II teachings and other magisterial documents, and a particular attention to the life and practice of the Church.<sup>167</sup> Second, it recalls section 31 of *Lumen Gentium*'s description of the lay faithful: negatively as "all the faithful except those in holy orders or those belong to religious state sanctioned by the church," and positively as the lay faithful, who are through baptism made one body with Christ, established among the people of God, and become sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and also in the mission of the whole Church. This section also highlights the unique character of the laity's vocation as seeking the kingdom of God "by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according the plan of God." Finally, it quotes approvingly Pope Pius XII's groundbreaking assertion that lay people do not only belong to, but are, the Church.<sup>168</sup>

After reiterating the teachings of the Synod Fathers, Vatican II, and Pius XII, John Paul II articulates his own description of the laity, which is based on the three pillars of baptism, participation in the triple mission of Christ, and secular character.<sup>169</sup> For him, "faith and baptism is the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the church."<sup>170</sup> He develops this idea further in his Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* affirming that every Christian identity has its source in the Blessed Trinity.<sup>171</sup> Through baptism, lay people are made "sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ."<sup>172</sup> Their participation in the triple mission of Christ has a secular feature, which is unique to their vocation and lies at the core of his description of the lay faithful. This secularity must be understood not only in its anthropological and social meanings, but also in a theological sense, that is, "in light of God's plan of

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<sup>167</sup> See Proposition 3 of "The Propositions of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 17:29 (31 December 1987) 500.

<sup>168</sup> Pius XII, "Acta PII PP. XII: Allocutiones I," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 38 (1946) 149.

<sup>169</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> John Paul II, *I will Give You Shepherds: Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 12 (Boston, Mass.: St Paul Books and Media, 1992) 26.

<sup>172</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 9, 23.

salvation and in the context of the mystery of the church.”<sup>173</sup> The Church lives in the world and has a secular dimension, and lay people share in this dimension but in different ways.<sup>174</sup> Hence, the world becomes “the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfil their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ.”<sup>175</sup> This secular quality, or presence and activity in the world, thus provides the most distinctive character for the identity and ministries of lay people.

These lay ministries, which are based on the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and matrimony, must be distinguished from those founded on the sacrament of orders.<sup>176</sup> The Pope goes on to caution against four possible abuses: “a too-indiscriminate use of the word *ministry*,” “the confusion and equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood,” “the tendency toward a ‘clericalization’ of lay people,” and the risk of creating an “ecclesial structure of parallel service to that founded on the sacrament of orders.”<sup>177</sup> He stresses that ministries, services, and charisms performed by lay people “exist in communion and on behalf of communion.”<sup>178</sup> Therefore, the discernment of charisms by pastors of the Church is always necessary.<sup>179</sup> In the same fashion, he sets forth several “criteria of ecclesiality” for discerning and recognising the lay associations, which lay people are free to form. Lay groups must give primacy to the vocation of Christians to holiness, profess the Catholic faith, maintain “a strong

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<sup>173</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15. It is interesting to recall that, during the 1950’s, the motto of the French Workers Priests movement was “Présence au monde est présence à Dieu” [To be present in the world is to be present to God]. This movement was banned by Rome but a decade later its theme became the starting point for *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

<sup>174</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 22-23.

<sup>177</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no.23.

<sup>178</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

<sup>179</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 24. In a General Audience talk given on 24 June 1992, the Pope proposes four criteria for discerning charisms: first, they must agree with the Church’s faith in Jesus Christ; second, they must be accompanied by the fruits of the Holy Spirit, including love, joy, and peace; third, they must be conformed with the Church’s authority and compliant with its directives; finally, they must make a contribution to the building up of the community and the life of communion with God. See *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998) 196-7.

and authentic communion in filial relationship” with the Pope and the local bishop, conform with, and participate in, the Church’s apostolic goals, and commit themselves to a presence in society, “at the service of the total dignity of the person,” in light of the social doctrine of the Church.<sup>180</sup>

With this description of the laity, which is anchored in the three pillars of baptism, secular character, and participation in the triple ministry of Jesus, the Pope has not added anything new to, but merely provided a clarification of, the teaching of Vatican II. However, earlier, in 1980, he provided a definition of the lay faithful, which is more dynamic and positive than the description proposed in *Lumen Gentium*. The laity, he said, are “by definition disciples and followers of Christ, men [*sic*] of the church who are present and active in the world’s heart, so as to administer temporal realities and order them toward God’ reign.”<sup>181</sup> At the conclusion of section nine of *Christifideles Laici*, he affirms that “only through accepting the richness in mystery that God gives to the Christian in baptism is it possible to come to a basic description of the lay faithful.”<sup>182</sup> Here we find John Paul II trying to overcome the age-old contest between the two views, ontological and functional, of the laity. By focusing on baptism, which is common to all the faithful, laity and clergy alike, the Pope seems to opt for an ontological identification of “laity” and “Christians”. However, by stressing on secular quality as the distinctive character of the lay faithful, he is intent on maintaining the functional differentiation between lay people and the ordained.<sup>183</sup>

In summary, John Paul II’s endeavour to harmonise the ontological and functional views of the laity, his insistence on the baptismal dignity of Christians, his accent on

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<sup>180</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 30.

<sup>181</sup> John Paul II, “Communion, Participation, Evangelization,” *Origins* 10:9 (31 July 1980) 135.

<sup>182</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9.

<sup>183</sup> John Paul II repeats this message declaring that “secularity is the true and distinctive mark of the layperson and of lay spirituality (*Ecclesia in America*,” no. 44, *Origins* 28:33 [4 February 1999] 579). Elsewhere, he lays down one of the three conditions required for the proper exercise of the Church’s evangelising mission: “a clear-cut distinction between the function of the laity, committed by specific vocation and charism to temporal tasks, and the function of pastors who dedicate themselves to forming the laity to live out those temporal tasks.” See “Letter to Brazilian Episcopal Conference (Vatican City, April 9, 1986),” in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited with Introductions, Commentary and Translations by Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990) 500.

the Church as a mystery of communion, employed as the framework for understanding the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, and his emphasis on their call to holiness, are entirely consistent with his insistence on the sacramental dignity of Christians. This dignity includes “the imitation and following of Christ, communion with one another and the missionary mandate.”<sup>184</sup> This position in turn emanates from his recurrent focus on human dignity, a leitmotif of his entire pontificate. In *Sources of Renewal*, a book written in 1972 as a guide for implementing Vatican II teachings in his archdiocese of Kraków, he insists that the dignity of all the faithful is “at once and the same time human dignity, which belongs to each man as an individual, and Christian dignity in the order of grace.”<sup>185</sup> The dignity of the human person, created to the image and likeness of God, and redeemed by the death and resurrection of the Son of God, is a biblical idea that unifies his theology, especially his social teachings. The human being, he declares, “must always be an end and not the means, a subject and not an object.”<sup>186</sup> In the Pope’s numerous writings and speeches, including his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) and his longest encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, he reiterates the Gospel’s emphasis on the dignity of every human life, and stresses that the Church has the duty to proclaim its message of justice, and denounce any individual, program and system that neglects or exploits human rights which are integral to human dignity.<sup>187</sup> In his view, preaching social doctrine is just the same as preaching the Gospel. In the last paragraph of *Christifideles Laici*, just before the final prayer, he affirms that lay people are called “to proclaim and to live the Gospel in service to the person and to society while respecting the totality of the values and needs of both.”<sup>188</sup> The Pope returns to this

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<sup>184</sup> John Paul II, “*Ecclesia in America*,” no. 44, *Origins* 28:33 (4 February 1999) 579.

<sup>185</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, translated by P.S. Falla (London: Collins, 1980) 143.

<sup>186</sup> John Paul II, “Towards a Common Ethical Code for Humankind: Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences 2001,” *Concilium* 4 (2001) 13.

<sup>187</sup> Avery Dulles notes that *Redemptor Hominis*, a predominantly Christological Encyclical, “sounds a number of themes that will be pursued in other documents and shows how these are connected with the central idea of human dignity founded upon the gifts of creation and redemption. It presents human dignity and liberation as the central focus of the Church’s proclamation” (*The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* [New York: Crossroad, 1999] 10). David Hollenbach argues that human rights are based on human dignity which is the source of all moral principles, not a moral principle itself (*Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* [New York: Paulist Press, 1979] 90).

<sup>188</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 64.

theme in his celebrated Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, where he takes into account the complex situation of the Asian people, the diversity of cultures, and the plurality of religions of the continent. It is in this context that he situates his discussion of vocation and mission of the laity, the topic of our investigation in the next section of this chapter.

### 8.3 The Laity in *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999)

Unlike *Christifideles Laici*, which deals with a single topic, the vocation and mission of the laity, and has as audience the entire universal Church, *Ecclesia in Asia* discusses many theological themes but addresses one single constituency, the local Church in Asia.<sup>189</sup> This choice of coverage suggests that the latter document has a broader theological scope and a more localised approach than the former. This particular orientation is underscored by the post-synodal document's Latin title, taken from its opening words, which translates literally as the "Church in Asia". Therefore, to understand its theology of the laity one has to analyse the document with a double reference to its major themes and the particular situations in Asia. Within this contextual framework, this section provides an exposition of the themes, the structure, and the context of *Ecclesia in Asia*, and critically reviews its theology of the laity with special reference to *Christifideles Laici*.

#### 8.3.1 Overview of the Contents, Structure, and Context of *Ecclesia in Asia*

*Ecclesia in Asia* is organised into seven chapters flanked by an introduction and a conclusion. It focuses on the new evangelisation,<sup>190</sup> the main theme of John Paul II's

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<sup>189</sup> Francisco F. Claver notes that at the 1998 Synod for Asia "a Curial Cardinal objected to the term 'Church of Asia' as it was being used in interventions on the floor and in some of the Synod's preliminary documents. The correct term, he insisted, was 'the Church in Asia'." See "Pope John Paul II and the Church of Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42:1-2 (2005) 95. He added wryly that evidently the Cardinal's opinion was "shared by official Rome and the document written by the Pope ... was itself titled 'the Church in Asia'." Ibid. For Claver, those who push for a greater inculturation of the faith "feel that the term 'Church of Asia' is just as legitimate and shouldn't be proscribed. It is not an altogether incorrect term, even theologically." Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 29. John Paul II mentioned the term "new evangelization" for the first time on 9 March 1983 in his address to the Latin American Bishops at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in the context of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1992 of the first evangelisation of the Americas. See "Apostolic Letter to Latin American Religious on the Occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World,"



Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, which details a program for the Church to welcome the Third Millennium of Christianity.<sup>191</sup> Preparing for the year 2000, he declared, was “a hermeneutical key” of his pontificate.<sup>192</sup> It aims to increase “sensitivity to all that the Spirit is saying to the church and to the churches,” as well as “to individuals through charisms meant to serve the whole community.”<sup>193</sup> The Pope determined that the objective of the third millennium jubilee, the overall context for *Ecclesia in Asia*, is “the strengthening of faith and of the witness of Christians.”<sup>194</sup> This jubilee includes the convening of five continental Synods to discuss the challenges of evangelisation according to the needs and situation of each continent.<sup>195</sup>

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*Origins* 20:13 (6 September 1990) 209, and endnote 1 on page 216; see also Avery Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” *America* 166:3 (1 February 1992) 55. The Pope provided a fuller explanation of this concept in *Christifideles Laici* (1988) no. 34, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) no. 33, and his “Apostolic Letter to the Latin American Religious on the Occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World.” See respectively, *Origins* 18:35 (9 February 1989) 577, *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 551, and *Origins* 20:13 (6 September 1990) 209, 211, 214-5. In *Redemptoris Missio* he made a threefold distinction of missionary activity: mission *ad gentes* in communities where Christ and his Gospel are not known; pastoral care for Christian communities in which the Church is adequately and solidly established; and “new evangelization” or “re-evangelization” for communities in which there has been a lapse of Christian faith. In his view, the term “new evangelisation” was popularised by *Evangelii Nuntiandi* as “a response to the new challenges that the contemporary world creates for the mission of the Church” (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* [London: Jonathan Cape, 1994] 114); see also Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 2: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition, edited by Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1998) 711-61. In a public address in Baltimore during his visit to America in 1995, John Paul II declared that “the challenge of the great jubilee of the year 2000 is the new evangelization: a deepening of faith and a vigorous response to the Christian vocation to holiness and service” (Homily in Oriole Park,” *Origins* 25:18 [19 October 1995] 313).

<sup>191</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*,” *Origins* 24:24 (24 November 1994) 401, 403-16.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23, *Origins* 24:24 (24 November 1994) 408. According to Peter C. Phan, “this hermeneutical key, which is eschatology, is deeply shaped by the Trinitarian mystery” (“God in the World: A Trinitarian Triptych,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years* [Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2001] 33). In this brilliant essay, Phan highlights the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity in John Paul II’s thought by linking the Pope’s call for the celebration of the third millennium with his trilogy of Encyclicals (the first two and the fifth) on the three persons of the Trinity, namely *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), *Dives in Misericordia* (13 November 1980), and *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986).

<sup>193</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*,” no. 23, *Origins* 24:24 (24 November 1994) 408.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 42, *Origins* 24:24 (24 November 1994) 412.

<sup>195</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 2. Avery Dulles notes that, while the Synod for America focuses on “the new evangelization” and “issues of justice, especially with regard to international economic relations,” and the Synod for Oceania on “the dialogue between Christianity and the aboriginal monotheistic religions,” the Synod for Asia deals mainly with “the challenges to evangelization offered by the encounter with the local cultures and with world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism” (“John Paul II and the Advent of the New Millennium,” *America* [9 December 1995] 14). According to Thomas C. Fox, “the Asian bishops were among those who were surprised by the call for a synod. They had not asked for a synod.” See *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 148.

The theme he chose for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, commonly referred to as the Asian Synod,<sup>196</sup> was “Jesus Christ the Savior and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia: ‘That they may have Life and have it Abundantly’ (Jn 10:10).”<sup>197</sup> In the introduction to the post-synodal document he describes the Asian Synod as “a moment of grace,”<sup>198</sup> “a celebratory remembering of the Asian roots of Christianity,” and “an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour.”<sup>199</sup> He repeats what he declared in an address to the bishops of Asia at the 10<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day in Manila, that evangelisation must be their “absolute priority,” and evangelisation is “the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>200</sup> In the conclusion, he returns to this theme of gratitude and encouragement, entrusting the Church in Asia to Mary, the mother of Christ, and encouraging all Asian Christians to fulfil their mission of love and service, and share with the peoples of Asia “the immense gift” that they have received: “the love of Jesus the Savior.”<sup>201</sup>

The seven chapters and fifty-one articles of *Ecclesia in Asia* can be grouped into three parts. Part 1 (chapter 1) provides an analysis of the Asian context. In Part 2, consisted of chapters 2 and 3, the Pope reflects on Jesus Christ as “a Gift for Asia” and the Holy Spirit as “Lord and Giver of Life.” Part 3, which comprises the last four chapters, discusses the evangelising duty of all members of the Church as witnesses to the Gospel (chapter 7) through proclamation and inculturation (chapter 4), communion and dialogue for mission (chapter 5), and the service of human promotion (chapter 6). This grouping was likely what John Paul II had in mind when he composed the post-synodal document. First, it displays an organising structure based on the “See, Judge,

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<sup>196</sup> Thomas Menamparampil contends that “historically speaking, the Asian Synod was the most important ecclesial event for Asia from the time of the great Councils (Nicea, Ephesus, Chalcedon)” (“Asia Through Asian Eyes,” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan [Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002] 30).

<sup>197</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 3.

<sup>199</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 4.

<sup>200</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 2.

<sup>201</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 50-1.

Act” process, a contextual methodology adopted by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne movement, and one that was familiar to the Pope,<sup>202</sup> with Part 1 corresponding to the “See” phase, Part 2, its doctrinal component, to the “Judge” phase, and Part 3, its pastoral and practical component, to the “Act” phase. Second, it is consistent with the three-fold emphasis of *Ecclesia in Asia*, which devotes chapter 4 to proclamation and inculturation or dialogue with the cultures, chapter 5 to dialogue with other Christian Churches and other religions on the basis of the Church as communion and mission, and chapter 6 to dialogue with the people of Asia, especially the poor.

Our grouping differs from what was proposed by James Kroeger, who structured the post-synodal document under “three underlying thematics.”<sup>203</sup> His first section, consisting of chapter 1, is “an exploration of the concrete situation of contemporary Asia.”<sup>204</sup> His second section, comprising chapters 2, 3, and 4, deals with the “Theological-Doctrinal Aspects of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit,” and his third section, composed of the last three chapters, discusses “The Church’s Mission of Love and Service in Asia.”<sup>205</sup> In his view, chapters 2, 3 and 4 together “describe a type of ‘doctrinal’ orientation to the Church’s Asian mission.”<sup>206</sup> The strength of this assertion is that it highlights the linkage between chapter 2 “Jesus the Saviour: A Gift to Asia” and chapter 4 “Jesus the Saviour: Proclaiming the Gift”, an implicit allusion

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<sup>202</sup> During the summer holiday in 1947, Father Wojtyla visited France and Belgium where he studied movements such as the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (established in 1924 in Belgium) and met with its founder, Canon Joseph Cardijn. See Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 4, 103, 130; Jean Comby, “L’évolution du laïcat au cours du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Lumière et Vie* 182 (1987) 10.

<sup>203</sup> James H. Kroeger, “Continuing Pentecost in Asia: Introducing *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002) 71; see also James H. Kroeger, “The Asian Churches’ Awakening to Mission,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 189-96; and “Introducing *Ecclesia in Asia*,” *Vidyajyoti* 64 (2000) 11-7.

<sup>204</sup> James H. Kroeger, “The Asian Churches’ Awakening to Mission,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 189. Hereafter, only the title of this classic book is cited, followed by relevant page numbers.

<sup>205</sup> James H. Kroeger, “Continuing Pentecost in Asia: Introducing *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002) 71; James H. Kroeger, “The Asian Churches’ Awakening to Mission,” *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 190.

<sup>206</sup> James H. Kroeger, “The Asian Churches’ Awakening to Mission,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 190.

to the Pope's gift/task idea, a logic that we contend is central to *Ecclesia in Asia*, and one that we have earlier identified in analysing *Christifideles Laici*. However, a close reading of these chapters suggests that chapters 2 and 3 offer a set of theological principles based on the Pope's articulation of a Christology and a Pneumatology for Asia, and chapter 4 deals less with the doctrinal aspects of Christ and much more with the primacy of proclamation and the necessity of inculturation, an endeavour to make the Gospel more intelligible and acceptable to Asian peoples. Therefore, we argue that it is more fruitful to group chapter 4 with chapters 5, 6, and 7 as together they constitute the pastoral vision of the Pope for Asia, and reflect better his emphasis on the Church's mission of love and service as proclamation and triple dialogue, with chapter 7 dealing specifically with Christians as witnesses to, and agents of, the Gospel. This grouping is also aligned with the triple dialogue vision of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, whose members constituted the majority of the Synod participants.<sup>207</sup> Indeed, in their propositions to the Pope "for his use in composing his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation,"<sup>208</sup> the Synod Fathers affirmed that "the threefold dialogue is one integral movement of the Christian's evangelising mission."<sup>209</sup> They also stated explicitly in their final message to the people of God that "the Church in Asia is called upon to enter a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor."<sup>210</sup>

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, the immediate context of *Ecclesia in Asia*, was attended by 252 delegates, including 188 Synod Fathers, 6 fraternal representatives, 18 *periti*, and 40 auditors.<sup>211</sup> Among the delegates were 6

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<sup>207</sup> The Synod for Asia was also attended by a small number of representatives from the Middle-East countries.

<sup>208</sup> Peter C. Phan notes that these propositions or recommendations "do not have a deliberative but only a consultative force," and *Ecclesia in Asia* has included all but eight of the fifty-nine propositions. See ["Editor's Notes,"] in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 140.

<sup>209</sup> [Synod of Bishops], "The Synod's Propositions," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 140-65.

<sup>210</sup> [Synod of Bishops], "Message to the People of God from the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia," *Origins* 28:2 (28 May 1998) 20.

<sup>211</sup> James H. Kroeger, "Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years* (Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2001) 171; see also James H. Kroeger, "Synod of Bishops for Asia," in *The Future of the*

patriarchs with 23 bishops from the Eastern rite Churches, 12 laymen, 8 women, and 8 sisters.<sup>212</sup> It was chaired by Pope John Paul II as its president, who was assisted by Cardinal Jan Schotte as its general secretary, Cardinals Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja (Indonesia), Stephen Kim Sou-Hwan (Korea), and Jozef Tomko (Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples) as the president's delegates, Taiwanese Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-Hsi as the general relator, and Indian Archbishop Thomas Menampampil as the special secretary.<sup>213</sup> Like most of previous Synods, the Synod for Asia has followed the same synodal process,<sup>214</sup> commencing with the distribution of the *Lineamenta*,<sup>215</sup> an outline document which was prepared by curial officials and published on 3 September 1996 in English and French, the two official languages of the Special Assembly, seeking responses from national bishops' conferences. Next came the release on 20 February 1998 of the *Instrumentum Laboris*,<sup>216</sup> a working document developed from the responses received in Rome before 1 August 1997. A meeting in Rome followed,<sup>217</sup> from 19 April to 14 May

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*Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002) 3. Of the participants 98 were elected delegates, 67 *ex officio*, and 23 nominated by the Pope; see Raymond Renson, "In the Shadow of the Synod for Asia (1998)," *The Japan Mission Journal* 52 (1998) 75-8. India has the greatest number of delegates with 27 coming from three Indian conferences, the Syro-Malankara, Syro-Malabar, and Latin rites, and the Philippines ranks second with 17 of which 13 were elected and 4 appointed as conference presidents. See Francisco Claver, "Personal Thoughts on the Asian Synod," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35:2 (1998) 242.

<sup>212</sup> John Mansford Prior, "A Tale of Two Synods: Observations on the Special Assembly for Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 62 (September 1998) 654-5. For Prior, the Asian Synod was the first assembly attended by "the ancient apostolic churches of the Near East, the Diaspora communities in Central Asia," and the FABC churches, and "this incipient pan-Asian awareness will prove to be the most notable accomplishment of the 1998 synod." See *ibid.*, 657.

<sup>213</sup> Peter C. Phan's "Introduction: 'A Moment of Grace'," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 3.

<sup>214</sup> For a succinct, yet comprehensive account of the synod process, see Peter C. Phan's "Introduction: 'A Moment of Grace'," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 2-4.

<sup>215</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, "'Lineamenta' for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia," *Origins* 26 (23 January 1997) 501, 503-20. Prior to the publication of the *Lineamenta*, there is a preparatory stage, which involves consultation with selected stakeholders for ideas and themes for the Pope's consideration and selection as the official theme of the Synod.

<sup>216</sup> [The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops], "*Instrumentum Laboris*: Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: That They May Have Life, and Have It Abundantly (Jn. 10:10)," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35:1 (1998) 3-53. This document also appears in *Origins* 27 (1998) 634-52.

<sup>217</sup> Kuncheria Pathin notes that "there is a wide-spread reaction all over Asia against the decision of covening the Asian Synod in Rome, and not somewhere in Asia ("Lineamenta for the Asian Synod: Some Observations and Comments," *Jeevadhara* 27 [1997] 258-9).

1998, consisting of 191 eight-minute speeches by delegates in fourteen general assemblies, sandwiched between two reports by the relator, small group discussions, preparation of propositions or recommendations, and the final message. Throughout this process, the Asian Synod was marked by a good dose of tensions, which flared up at two particular moments, in the responses to the *Lineamenta* and in the interventions by Asian participants.<sup>218</sup> As these responses and interventions were widely reported by the media in the period before, during, and after the Asian Synod,<sup>219</sup> and have since been analysed in numerous books and journal articles,<sup>220</sup> we will provide here only a brief discussion, highlighting the salient points that are pertinent to our subsequent comparison of the theologies of John Paul II and the FABC.

The *Lineamenta* comprises an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, and fourteen questions about areas of concern for the bishops' observations. One of its central themes is Jesus Christ as the one and only saviour, and his central role in God's plan of salvation. Topics covered can be gleaned from the chapter headings: Asian Realities (chapter 1), Evangelisation in Asia (chapter 2), God's Salvific Design in History (chapter 3), Jesus Christ: God's Good News of Salvation to All (chapter 4), The Church as Communion (chapter 5), and The Church's Mission of Love and Service in Asia (chapter 6).<sup>221</sup> The *Lineamenta* generated extensive, and mostly

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<sup>218</sup> Tom C. Fox, a veteran journalist who had reported on five previous Synods, notes that, unlike their African counterparts, the FABC bishops "never asked for a synod. Many were shocked and even angered when Cardinal Jan P. Schotte, secretary general of the Synod, announced it in 1995" ("Asian bishops remain politely persistent," *National Catholic Reporter* [8 May 1998] 13); see also Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 150. Supporting this view, John Mansford Prior observes that the "FABC Churches meet regularly and did not see the necessity of holding a synod" ("A Tale of Two Synods: Observations on the Special Assembly for Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 62 [September 1998] 657).

<sup>219</sup> UCA News or UCAN website contains the most comprehensive coverage of the Asian Synod. UCAN reports are available online at <http://www.ucanews.com>.

<sup>220</sup> The most notable of these works is *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002). Other useful publications include *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002); Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002); various articles in the *East Asian Pastoral Review*, *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection*, *Jeevadhara*, *Japan Mission Journal*, *Origins*, *Third Millennium*, *Eglises d'Asie*, *The Tablet* of 25 April, 2 May, 9 May, and 23 May 1998, and the *National Catholic Reporter*, in particular, the issues of 27 March, 10 April, 17 April, 1 May, and 8 May 1998.

<sup>221</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, "'Lineamenta' for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia," *Origins* (23 January 1997) 501, 503-20.

negative, responses from Asian bishops' conferences,<sup>222</sup> which, combined together, pointed to a divergence, not opposition, between two theological views, a universalist approach adopted by curial officials, who placed more emphasis on unity than catholicity by insisting on the proclamation of Christ as the universal and only saviour even in the Asian context and paying less attention to its cultural and religious diversity, and a contextual orientation espoused by the bishops of Asia, who stressed the necessity of dialogue and looked for ways of presenting an image of Jesus that is more relevant to the aspirations and psyche of Asian peoples. This divergence revolved chiefly around Christological and Pneumatological issues, the two major doctrinal themes of *Ecclesia in Asia*.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Jacques Dupuis and James H. Kroeger lists several reasons for these negative responses: first, the theological vision of the FABC was ignored in the *Lineamenta*; second, the document adopts a narrow, ecclesiocentric perspective of mission theology; third, it lacks a robust pneumatology to permit an open and positive evaluation of Asian religious traditions and the importance of interreligious dialogue; fourth, the theology of local Church was underdeveloped, failing to stress the imperative for local Churches to put on an Asian face. See Jacques Dupuis, "Synod for Asia: First Echoes," in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002) 22-3; James H. Kroeger, "Synod of Bishops for Asia: Panoramic Overview." Ibid., 4-5. For a detailed account of the responses from East and Southeast Asian bishops' conferences to the subjects raised by each of the *Lineamenta*'s chapters, see Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 154, 157-65.

<sup>223</sup> G. Gispert-Sauch observes that the *Lineamenta* is "heavily theological" due to "the Holy See's great concern for doctrinal correctness" ("The *Lineamenta* for the Asian Synod: Presentation and Comment," *Vidyajyoti* 61 (1997) 8. The universalist approach of the Roman Curia, which accented the universal in Christology over the particular, was foreshadowed by Cardinal Ratzinger in his address to a group of bishops from mission territories in 1996, and earlier to the presidents of the doctrinal commissions of the bishops' conferences of Latin America. In these speeches, he contends that relativism has succeeded the radical form of liberation theology of the 1980's as the central problem for faith today. This "dangerous relativism" attenuates Christology, and advocates *inter alia* that Christ is but one face of ultimate reality, and all religions provide equal paths to attain the transcendent. See Joseph Ratzinger, "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today," *Origins* 26:20 (31 October 1996) 309, 311; Francis X. Clooney, "Relativism in Perspective: Rereading Ratzinger," *Commonweal* 124:2 (31 January 1997) 9. A year later, the International Theological Commission, chaired by the same Cardinal, released a document on "Christianity and the World Religions," distinguishing between the Spirit's universal presence, "which cannot be separated from the paschal mystery of Jesus," and the Spirit's special presence in the Church as the privileged place of the Spirit's action. See International Theological Commission, "Christianity and the World Religions," nos. 81, 56, 61, *Origins* 27:10 (14 August 1997) 161, 158-9. This document explains that "*universality* means *versus unum*, toward one," and the word spirit, also called *dynamics* (power), means movement, and this movement includes the direction toward Jesus as can be derived from his words about sending the Spirit, the Paraclete. Ibid., no. 53, *Origins* 27:10 [14 August 1997] 157-8. The document concludes that "only in Jesus," "the only mediator," "can human beings be saved", and therefore "Christianity has an evident claim to universality," and that "there can be no roads leading to God that do not converge in the only road which is Christ." Ibid., no. 49, *Origins* 27:10 [14 August 1997] 157.

The strongest salvos of criticisms, also one of the most representative of the views of the Asian bishops, came from the bishops of Japan, who questioned the “the very purpose and process of the synod itself.”<sup>224</sup> Instead of answering the questions proposed in the *Lineamenta*, they formulated their own list of topics and questions, which they thought were more in line with the realities of the Church in Asia and the thought of the FABC.<sup>225</sup> Service and dialogue, two recurrent themes in the documents of the FABC, and fundamental principles for the Churches in Asia, did not receive sufficient emphasis in the *Lineamenta*.<sup>226</sup> They detected a lack of understanding of the Asian culture and “overtones of Roman imperialism,”<sup>227</sup> and criticised its traditional scholastic approach, which privileges “distinctions” and “differences” while the Asian psyche is more inclined on searching for “creative harmony rather than distinctions.”<sup>228</sup> Instead of the usual succession of reports delivered by delegates, they suggested that representatives of the two blocs of bishops, the FABC, and the Middle East, provide reports on their history and current problems to give focus to the issues to be discussed by the Synod.<sup>229</sup> Small groups should be formed based on “themes or religious cultures (Islamic Culture, Hindu Culture, Hinayana Buddhist Culture, Mahayana Buddhist Culture, Confucian Culture, etc)” rather than languages.<sup>230</sup> These arrangements would enable participants to focus on topics of common interest and

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<sup>224</sup> Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 154.

<sup>225</sup> See *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 27; *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35:1 (1998) 91-2. After receiving the Japanese translation of the *Lineamenta* and the proposed questions, the bishops of Japan first asked their priests to answer the questions. The reaction from these priests was that it was not possible to answer them. The bishops then prepared their own questions for the Japanese Church. See *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 27-8; Chrys McVey, “The Asian Synod: What is at Stake?” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35:1 (1998) 142.

<sup>226</sup> *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 31.

<sup>227</sup> The Tablet, “Look at It Our Ways: Asian Bishops Respond to Rome,” *The Tablet* (2 May 1998) 571. Indeed, the Japanese bishops did not mince their words, “from the way the questions are proposed, one feels that the holding of the synod is like an occasion for the central office to evaluate the performance of the branch offices. That kind of synod would not be worthwhile for the Church in Asia” (“Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences to the *Lineamenta*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 27).

<sup>228</sup> “Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences to the *Lineamenta*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 31.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*



hence facilitate the development of action plans. In their view, the *Lineamenta*'s Christology is defensive and apologetic, and its ecclesiology "not as rich or deep as that of Vatican II."<sup>231</sup> In Asia, they insist, "before stressing that Jesus Christ is the Truth, we must search more deeply into how he is the Way and the Life."<sup>232</sup> They stated categorically that there would be "no dialogue, common living, or solidarity with other religions" if too much emphasis is placed upon proclaiming Jesus Christ as "the one and only saviour."<sup>233</sup> Dialogue, the Indonesian bishops declared, is "the primary mode of evangelization."<sup>234</sup> This sentiment was echoed by the Indian bishops who affirmed that it is "a duty and should be the central care also of the whole Church."<sup>235</sup> For the Vietnamese bishops, "Western, and especially scholastic, theology is not adapted to the religions of Asia, because it is too rational."<sup>236</sup> In their view, "for the Asians, one cannot analyze the truth nor explain the mystery. There is a preference for silence over words and not getting entangled in quarrels over words. The word is only the finger pointing to the moon; what matters is the moon and not the finger."<sup>237</sup> Making a clear reference to the fierce debate on the origin of other religions, and seemingly in favour of a *de jure* rather than *de facto* explanation, the Vietnamese bishops affirmed that "since God is the Creator of all things, one should say that, in a sense, the existence of these non-Christian religions is equally part of his

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. Thomas C. Fox observes that, in terms of theological contents, the response of the bishops of Japan was not much different from the teachings of the FABC over its previous twenty-five year history, except its "the exasperated tone." See *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 154. For a helpful overview of the FABC's position on dialogue, see Sebastian Painadath, "Theological Perspectives of FABC on Interreligious Dialogue," *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997) 272-88.

<sup>234</sup> "Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences to the *Lineamenta*," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 24. Jonathan Y. Tan provides a detailed analysis of the responses of the Indonesian and Japanese bishops to the *Lineamenta* arguing that their responses "stand out from the rest for their frank and critical reflections on the contents of the *Lineamenta*," and together they highlight two important issues: "the emergence of an Asian Christology" and "the proclamation vs. dialogue debate." See "The Responses of the Indonesian and Japanese Bishops to the *Lineamenta*," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 59, 64-9.

<sup>235</sup> "Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences to the *Lineamenta*," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 20.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>237</sup> "Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences to the *Lineamenta*," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 49.

Providence.”<sup>238</sup> Sharing this view, the Korean Episcopal Conference declared that other traditional religions “play a part in the salvific economy of God.”<sup>239</sup> In Korea, this understanding is “essential for the inculturation of the Gospel,” as “inculturation still remains in its beginning stage.”<sup>240</sup> The Sri Lankan bishops felt that “the true identity of Jesus must find new expressions” in the context of the world religions and secular culture, and “Jesus Christ must be presented as completely fulfilling all human aspirations.”<sup>241</sup> For the bishops of the Philippines, “the greatest gift that Christians can offer Asia is their faith in Jesus Christ,” and to give this gift they must become “Christ-like, do mission in dialogue and not in any sense of superiority or triumphalism but in true incarnation of Jesus Christ in the cultures of Asia, in mutual enrichment, in human promotion, in the struggle for justice and peace, in the promotion of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>242</sup> Most of the responses by the Asian bishops also referred to the growing gap between the rich and the poor, pointing to the need for the Churches in Asia to engage in the dialogue with the poor. These comments were incorporated into the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which was “less defensive, with less emphasis on proclamation,”<sup>243</sup> and theologically, represented “a significant improvement over the *Lineamenta*.”<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>243</sup> [Editorial], “Asian Voices in Rome,” *The Tablet* (25 April 1998) 507.

<sup>244</sup> Editor, “The *Instrumentum Laboris*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 73. Jacques Dupuis and James H. Kroeger highlighted several improvements in the *Instrumentum Laboris*: a change to the structure and an incorporation of more FABC’s ideas; a regnocentric view of the Church instead of an ecclesiocentric conception; more discussion on justice, interreligious dialogue, Asian realities, and integral evangelisation; and an emphasis on the Church in Asia as a communion of local Churches. See Jacques Dupuis, “Synod for Asia: First Echoes,” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002) 23-4; James H. Kroeger, “Synod of Bishops for Asia: Panoramic Overview,” *ibid.*, 5. Peter C. Phan noted two structural changes in the *Instrumentum Laboris*: first, it had one chapter more than the *Lineamenta*: the first chapter of the *Lineamenta* was divided into two in the *Instrumentum Laboris*: “Asian Realities” and “Ecclesial Realities in Asia”; second, the order of chapters 3 and 4 in the *Lineamenta* was reversed in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which now contained chapter 4, entitled “Jesus Christ: The Good News of Salvation” and chapter 5 dealing with “God’s Salvific Design: The Holy Spirit at Work.” See “Introduction: ‘A Moment of Grace’,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 3.

Indeed, one of these improvements is the *Instrumentum Laboris*'s recognition of the need for an ecclesiology of communion that presents local Church as a community of communities, and its appreciation that national Churches should be given more autonomy "in areas of dialogue, inculturation and adaptation."<sup>245</sup> The document acknowledges that in Asia, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the unique and universal saviour is quite problematic as the Church has only a minority status in all countries except the Philippines, and is still not seen as totally Asian.<sup>246</sup> Its main theme is "how to carry out the mission of Jesus in Asia today,"<sup>247</sup> and its content condensed into three main topics in the *Relatio ante Disceptationem* or first report delivered by Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-Shi, the Synod's Secretary: "Asian realities as the context of the Church's mission, Jesus Christ as the Good News of Salvation, and the various forms of the Church's mission in Asia."<sup>248</sup> Overall, the *Instrumentum Laboris* reflects better the vision and ideas of the bishops of Asia, who would be more frank and forthright in their interventions and in the *circuli minores* or small groups discussions.

Analysing the interventions and the reports of the *circuli minores*, Peter C. Phan notes that five major issues occupied the minds of the bishops of Asia: "dialogue with Asian religions, dialogue with Asian cultures, dialogue with Asian poor, the indispensable role of the laity, and the necessity of legitimate autonomy for the local churches."<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> [General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops]. "Instrumentum Laboris," nos. 35, 38, *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35:1 (1998) 34-5, 37.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 14-5, 27-8.

<sup>247</sup> Editor, "The *Instrumentum Laboris*," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 73. For an excellent overview of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, including a summary of the main points of each chapter, see *ibid.*, 73-6.

<sup>248</sup> Editor, "The *Relatio Ante Disceptationem*," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 85. Michael Amaladoss notes that as a preparatory tool, the *Instrumentum Laboris* does not require any commentary, and its sole purpose is to provide an outline of "the topics for discussion at the synod as suggested by the different Churches." See "Theological Evaluation," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 53. For Thomas C. Fox, the 24,000-word working document "did not lay out an agenda for the synod," but "went from narration to exhortation to assertion" (*Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* [New York: Orbis Books, 2002] 165). He observes that the *Instrumentum Laboris* ignores the recommendation made by several Asian bishops' conferences to adopt the see/judge/act method in analysing reality, a methodology associated with contextual theology." See *ibid.*, 169.

<sup>249</sup> "Introduction: 'A Moment of Grace'," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 6. According to John Mansford Prior's estimate, 76.3 percent of the interventions can be grouped into four main topics as follows: 22.5 percent on interfaith dialogue, 21.4 percent on dialogue with Asian cultures, 17.2 on dialogue with the poor, and 15.2 percent on discussion of the Church of Asia as a Church of the

Five Japanese bishops spoke on the first day and their speeches highlighted major theological and pastoral issues confronted by Asian Churches. Jesuit Archbishop Leo Jun Ikenaga of Osaka, the first delegate to address the Synod, attributed the failure of evangelisation in Japan and also Asia to the differences between the cultures of East Asia and the West, and told the Synod that the Church must express the Christian message in “Asian ways” by adopting the approach of Jesus whose ministry covered “the whole spectrum of human life and society,” and involved “healing of the sick, confronting discrimination in society, helping the poor in practical ways,” and not merely evangelising through “preaching, dogma, and catechism.”<sup>250</sup> For Bishop Berard Toshio Oshikawa of Naha, Japan, some of the reasons “why Christianity does not grow in Japan,” are “the ingrained Westernization of the language of our theology, the rhythm and structure of our liturgies and the programs of our catechesis,” which “fail to touch the hearts of those who come searching.”<sup>251</sup> Bishop Augustinus Jun Ichi Nomura of Nagoya, reminded the Synod that in Asia, “the eyes have a more central role than the ears in the process of religious insight and conversion,” and to proclaim Christ to Japanese and Asian peoples, the Church should present him as “the spiritual Master who opens the way to real freedom, simplicity and forgiveness, and to full communion in solidarity, compassion and peace.”<sup>252</sup> According to Bishop Arturo Bastes of Romblon, Philippines, four shifts are required for the true emergence of the Asian Church: “a shift from the perspective of a Euro-centred church to an authentically Asian view, a shift in the understanding of history, a shift in the model of the church, a shift in the understanding of spirituality.”<sup>253</sup> Other

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laity. See “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of Ecclesia in Asia,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 238. He also notes that eighteen of the 191 interventions concerns the need for a more participative and collegial Church. Ibid; see also James H. Kroeger, “Synod of Bishops for Asia: Panoramic Overview” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002) 6; Thomas C. Fox, “Polite Toward Rome, True to their Mission,” *National Catholic Reporter* (28 January 2000) 11.

<sup>250</sup> Leo John [sic] Ikenaga, “Asian Ways of Expression,” *Origins* 27:46 (7 May 1998) 769-70.

<sup>251</sup> Berard T. Oshikawa, “Pastoral Life in Asia and the ‘Principle of Graduality’,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 104.

<sup>252</sup> Augustinus Jun Ichi Nomura, “Communicating the Gospel in Japan,” *Origins* 27:46 (7 May 1998) 771.

<sup>253</sup> Arturo Bastes, “Asian Formation for Consecrated Life,” *Origins* 27:46 (7 May 1998) 775.

bishops such as John Tong Hon of Hong Kong stressed the need for witnessing rather than teaching.<sup>254</sup> For Bishop Paul Nguyen Van Hoa, who spoke in the name of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference, the affirmation that “there is but one Mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ” does not mean that his unique role “excludes the collaboration of others in the plan of salvation that God realizes throughout history.”<sup>255</sup> Recalling briefly the Chinese Rites Controversy, Vietnamese Archbishop Stephen Nguyen Nhu The insisted that in Vietnam “inculturation must deal with the serious problem of the cult of ancestors,” as most Vietnamese “still pray to their ancestors in their family life” (emphasis added).<sup>256</sup> The tension between the bishops of Asia and the curial prelates reached its climax in the intervention of Carmelite Bishop Francis Hadisumarta, who spoke on behalf of the Indonesian Episcopal Conference, calling for a change in the relationship between the bishops’ conferences and the Roman Curia, and declaring that “the Catholic Church is not a monolithic pyramid,” but “a communion of local churches,” and “bishops are not branch secretaries waiting for instructions from headquarters!”<sup>257</sup> Sister Filomena Hirota, speaking on behalf of the Japanese Religious Leadership Conference, called for “a Church in solidarity with the cry of women in a prophetic way,” and recommended a “minimum of 30% participation of women in all Church organizations and councils,” given that in many countries women constitute between 70 to 80 percent of Church membership.<sup>258</sup> Indonesia Protestant Bishop Agustina Lumentut, an ecumenical delegate from the Christian Conference of Asia, challenged the Church to walk with women, not only from the same religions and also from other

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<sup>254</sup> John Tong Hon, “Understanding the Catholics of China,” *Origins* 27:46 (7 May 1998) 765.

<sup>255</sup> Paul Nguyen Van Hoa, “Evangelization in Vietnam,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 123.

<sup>256</sup> Stephen Nguyen Nhu The, “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124 and 125 respectively.

<sup>257</sup> Francis Hadisumarta, “Enhanced Role for Bishops’ Conferences,” *Origins* 27:46 (7 May 1998) 773. Hadisumarta’s electrifying statement is not much off the mark if one recalls that, back in 1966, Professor Joseph Ratzinger wrote that “for the early Christians ... the Church was first realized in the individual local Church, which was not merely a separate part of a larger administrative body, but which contained the total reality of the Church within it. The local Churches were not administrative branches of a large organization; they were the living cells, in each of which the *whole* mystery of the *one* body of the Church was present, so that each was simply called *Ecclesia*, Church.” See *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966) 121.

<sup>258</sup> Filomena Hirota, “[Synod Interventions],” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37:3 (2000) 276-7.

religions, who are walking together, victims of poverty and suffering due to violent conflicts and economic crises.<sup>259</sup>

The Asian bishops' interventions, which focused on proclamation through witness, interreligious dialogue, inculturation, and solidarity with the poor, and more autonomy for local Churches, were in marked contrast with the main themes underscored by several curial cardinals: the necessity of the proclamation of Jesus as the unique and universal saviour, and the need to maintain unity with the Pope and his collaborators. Cardinal William Baum of the Apostolic Penitentiary encourages Asians to proclaim "with apostolic boldness that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour."<sup>260</sup> For Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, "the incarnation of the Son of God and his mission on this earth" is the central mystery of faith and the most important event in history, and as such, it "must be communicated, manifested and announced to all."<sup>261</sup> He considers interreligious dialogue and proclamation as authentic, legitimate, and necessary elements of the Church's evangelising mission,<sup>262</sup> but declares that while the Church honours all wise persons, "there is no wisdom equal to that of Jesus."<sup>263</sup> Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Secretary of State, categorically equates the unity of the Church with "the unity with the pope and with his collaborators in the Roman Curia and his representatives throughout the world."<sup>264</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, reflects on the wider aspect of the Church as institution and suggests that "institutions taken by themselves can all be well founded, but if they are too numerous, they can immobilize the Church. Hence it is necessary to examine

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<sup>259</sup> Austina Lumentut, "[Synod Interventions]," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37:3 (2000) 273.

<sup>260</sup> Cardinal William Baum, "Proclaiming the Truth About Jesus Christ," *Origins* 27:46 (7 May 1998) 772.

<sup>261</sup> Jozef Tomko, "The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ," *Origins* 27:46 (7 May 1998) 779.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 780.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 779.

<sup>264</sup> Editor, "What the Synod Participants Were Saying," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 90.

whether certain institutions that were once useful are still of use or rather hinder the growth of the Church.”<sup>265</sup>

The divergence between the views of the Asian bishops and the Roman Curia was also displayed in Cardinal Shan Kuo-Hsi’s *Relatio post Disceptationem*.<sup>266</sup> This Mid-term Report, which purports to summarise all speeches, emphasises the key themes of curial interventions, namely, the universality and uniqueness of Christ as saviour, and the urgency of proclaiming the Gospel.<sup>267</sup> It also mentions many challenging ideas proffered by Asian participants such as presenting Jesus Christ as “the guru, the liberator, and the wisdom of God,” “the Enlightened One,” or “the one who shares the kenosis (or self-emptying) of the Asian peoples.”<sup>268</sup> The *Relatio post Disceptationem* and its sixteen questions became the basis for discussion in eleven small language groups,<sup>269</sup> but participants were free to raise any issues outside this framework. Gerard O’Connell noted that these questions “did not flow naturally from the interventions and were theologically framed in a Roman way.”<sup>270</sup> Some of the notable questions were “how Christ should be proclaimed in Asia,” and “how can Jesus be presented as more than simply one of the saviours,” and others dealt with “the image of the Church in the light of other religions,” the communion between the local Church and the universal Church, and ways to avoid tensions among particular

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<sup>265</sup> Quoted by Editor, “What the Synod Participants Were Saying,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 90. For the editor, this statement is “surprising for its openness” given Cardinal Ratzinger’s conservative views. See *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>266</sup> According to *The Tablet*, the *Relatio post Disceptationem* has “provoked bafflement” because it was completed on Friday 24 April 98, before the delivery of interventions on Saturday, Monday and Tuesday. See “Synod in Rome on Long Path to Enlightenment,” *The Tablet* (9 May 1998) 599. Another reason for this controversy is that the sixteen questions, proposed as topics for discussion in small language groups, “seem to express more the concerns of the Roman curia than those of the Asian bishops.” See Editor, “*Relatio post Disceptationem*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 127.

<sup>267</sup> For an overview of the salient points and a brief account of the controversy relating to the 43-page *Relatio post Disceptationem*, see “Synod in Rome on Long Path to Enlightenment,” *The Tablet* (9 May 1998) 599-600.

<sup>268</sup> See “Synod in Rome on Long Path to Enlightenment,” *The Tablet* (9 May 1998) 599.

<sup>269</sup> Synod participants were divided into eleven small groups according to languages: eight in English, two in French (attended mainly by Middle Eastern and Vietnamese delegates), and one in Italian.

<sup>270</sup> Gerard O’Connell, “Doing It the Asian Way,” *The Tablet* (16 May 1998) 647.

Churches and between particular Churches and the Roman dicasteries.<sup>271</sup> All group reports concurred that “Christ is the one and only saviour” but suggested “a gradual unfolding of that message in Asia,” and emphasised that the best witness to Jesus is the witness of life.<sup>272</sup> The reports of these *circuli minores*, according to Peter C. Phan, display “notable theological divergences among various groups, with English-speaking participants tending to be more ‘liberal’, and Italian-speaking ones more ‘conservative’.”<sup>273</sup>

Indeed, for English Group A, the proposed questions did not bring out “all the concerns of the *Instrumentum Laboris* nor the interventions of the Synod Fathers.”<sup>274</sup> In response to an irritating question of how the Church should deal with some unorthodox trends among some theologians with regard to the divinity of Jesus and his unique mediation of salvation, this group assured the Synod that in Asia this is not a general trend, and only one or two theologians hold such views.<sup>275</sup> It went on to recommend that the principle of subsidiarity, articulated by Pope Pius XI in his 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, must be put in practice.<sup>276</sup> English Group H made a similar remark: “Many of the Asian traits which were found in the interventions are lost in the *relatio post disceptationem*.”<sup>277</sup> English Group B complained about the entrenched bureaucracy of the Roman Curia and its tight control over the translation of liturgical texts.<sup>278</sup> These practices have hindered the smooth and efficient operation of national episcopal conferences and prevented the development of a much needed inculturated liturgy. English Group G wished that curial officials showed more “pastoral attention and charity” together with “a warm and welcoming attitude” in

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 647-9.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 647.

<sup>273</sup> Editor, “*Relatio post Disceptationem*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 127.

<sup>274</sup> Remigius Peter, “Report of Group Discussions: English Group A,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 128.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.; see also “Synod in Rome on Long Path to Enlightenment,” *The Tablet* (9 May 1998) 599.

<sup>276</sup> Remigius Peter, “Report of Group Discussions: English Group A,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 128, 130.

<sup>277</sup> See “Synod in Rome on Long Path to Enlightenment,” *The Tablet* (9 May 1998) 600.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.



their dealings with Asian Churches. Finally, English Group D is convinced that the Synod of Bishops would be more productive if more lay people were allowed to participate.<sup>279</sup> In contrast to these concerns, the Italian Group cautioned against the employment of analogies “between Jesus and figures of other religions” as this could create confusion for people on the real identity of Jesus Christ, who is the sole saviour.<sup>280</sup> It suggested that “religious experience of Jesus Christ should be deepened as to the way to interreligious dialogue,” and called for attention to “certain theologians, especially Indian, who have exaggerated the salvific value of other religions.”<sup>281</sup> French Group B did not address all questions systematically but compiled opinions expressed by each participant. It lamented the fact that the *Relatio post Disceptationem* does not contain the expression “Christ is Perfect Man, Perfect God,” and considered formulations such as “Jesus, the unique Savior” too aggressive.<sup>282</sup> Therefore, it made a case for a continual search for another more humble expression.<sup>283</sup> For the Group, “Christ cannot be enclosed in formulations, even though they must be used.”<sup>284</sup> The Group also proposed that the word “persecutions” be replaced with “difficulties” as the former term can offend the sensibility of China.<sup>285</sup>

The outcome of the next phase in the synodal process was the submission in secrecy to the Pope of a list of fifty-nine propositions or recommendations for his consideration in preparing the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, including a recommendation that the post-synodal document adopt an Asian way of presenting its contents, comprising a description of secular and ecclesial situations in Asia, and a discovery of the seeds “sown by the Holy Spirit and their fulfilment in Jesus

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<sup>279</sup> See “Synod in Rome on Long Path to Enlightenment,” *The Tablet* (9 May 1998) 600.

<sup>280</sup> Armando Bortolasso, “Report of Group Discussions: Italian Group” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 136.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>282</sup> Emile Destombes, “Report of Group Discussions: French Group B” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 131.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Christ”.<sup>286</sup> These propositions are loosely knit together by a contextual approach that provides a logical cohesion in their progress, starting with a rapid review of the challenge of Asia and ecclesial realities (nos. 2 and 4), followed by reflections on Christological and Pneumatological issues in a Trinitarian perspective (nos. 5 to 12), and concluding with considerations of, and suggestions for, the life, activities, members, and mission of the Church *ad intra* and *ad extra*, including proclamation, ecumenism, and the triple dialogue (nos. 13 to 44). The remainder propositions, except the last two, a note of thanks, and a prayer to Mary, “an example of perfect discipleship,” and “the Mother of all evangelisers,”<sup>287</sup> deal with local Churches in the Orient, Jerusalem, China, North Korea, Iraq, newly independent countries from the former Soviet Union, and an assortment of topics such as social communications, abortion, ecology, the debt crisis, globalisation, and Asian saints and martyrs (nos. 45-57). This list reaffirms that the Church in Asia professes Jesus Christ as “the one and only Savior and unique mediator of salvation for all peoples,” and sharing this gift of faith is the best service that the Church can bring to the peoples of Asia (nos. 12, 8).<sup>288</sup> The document moves on to stress that the Holy Spirit is “the prime mover in evangelisation” and the prime agent of “inculturation, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and human promotion” (no. 12).<sup>289</sup> Therefore, all Church members, bishops, priests, religious, and laity, have to be “Spirit-filled and Spirit-led” (no. 12).<sup>290</sup> It recognises that “proclamation has manifold forms” (no. 40), and inculturation, human promotion, and interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, are integral to the Church’s evangelisation (nos. 41-44).<sup>291</sup> Finally, reiterating one of the FABC’s favourite statements, it affirms that “building Basic Ecclesial Communities is a new way of being Church in Asia,” as these communities provide proper orientation to pastoral

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<sup>286</sup> “The Synod’s Propositions,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 141.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-3.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-60.

plans and effective ways of encouraging more participation, especially of lay people, in local Churches (no. 30).<sup>292</sup>

The Synod concludes with a public message, prepared under the leadership of Archbishop Oscar Cruz, Secretary of the FABC, which conveys its mood and captures its themes despite claiming to refer only “to a few issues raised during the Synod.”<sup>293</sup> It highlights the duty of all Christians to proclaim Christ, the importance of inculturation, the necessity of interreligious dialogue, and the need for dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor.<sup>294</sup> It acknowledges an increasingly important role of the laity in the mission of the Church, and considers the 21<sup>st</sup> century as “the Age of the Laity.”<sup>295</sup> This view is reinforced in the closing speech by Cardinal Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja of India, which emphasises the role of lay people in the Church’s mission *ad extra*, and insists that their “empowerment and ongoing formation” is essential.<sup>296</sup> Revisiting the overall theme of the Synod for Asia, he declares that “‘being Church in Asia’ today means ‘participating in the mission of Christ the Savior, in rendering his redemptive love and service in Asia’,” so that Asian peoples can more fully achieve their integral human development and “‘that they may have life and have it abundantly’.”<sup>297</sup> These statements succinctly summarise the major themes, the structure, and the context of *Ecclesia in Asia*, and at the same time, highlight the critical role of lay people in the mission of the Church in Asia, a subject of our investigation in the next section.

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<sup>292</sup> “The Synod’s Propositions,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 153.

<sup>293</sup> “Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 172. James H. Kroeger, “Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years* (Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2001) 171.

<sup>294</sup> “Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 168-9.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>296</sup> Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja, “A Church With a Truly Asian Face,” *Origins* 28:2 (28 May 1998) 26.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

### 8.3.2 Critical Analysis of the Theology of the Laity in *Ecclesia in Asia*

Of the many topics and ideas presented in *Ecclesia in Asia*, the concept of “gift” stands out as one that occupies a central place in the Apostolic Exhortation. This observation is borne out by an examination of chapters 2 and 3 that provide the document’s doctrinal framework, and chapter 4 that discusses the primacy of proclamation of Jesus the Saviour as the gift to Asia and the challenge of inculturation. In these chapters, the concept of “gift” is intimately linked to the notion of faith.<sup>298</sup> As Jesus himself is the “gift of faith,”<sup>299</sup> it is a task for all Christians, including the laity, to proclaim and share this gift. This gift/task motif (neatly expressed in French as *don et devoir*, or in German as *die Gabe und die Aufgabe*), runs through the whole post-synodal document.<sup>300</sup> It is stated with crystal clarity in the first paragraph (no. 1), forcefully at the beginning of chapters 2 and 4 (nos. 10 and 19 respectively), and emphatically as a departing thought toward the end of the post-synodal document (no. 50). For John Paul II, “the Good News of Jesus Christ” is the “gift of all gifts,”<sup>301</sup> and “the Church’s faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared.”<sup>302</sup> It is, writes the Pope, “the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia.”<sup>303</sup> Therefore, “sharing the truth of Jesus with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith,”<sup>304</sup> and the Church in Asia “cannot cease to proclaim” this “unique gift of faith” which she has received for the good of all.<sup>305</sup> In his view, “what distinguishes the Church from other religious communities is her faith in Jesus Christ; and she cannot keep this precious light of faith under a bushel.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Elsewhere, the Pope also refers to “the gift of hierarchical communion.” See *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 3.

<sup>299</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 4, 10; see also the headings of chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>300</sup> See, for instance, *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 1, 10, 12, 19, 20, 31, 35, 50.

<sup>301</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 19.

<sup>302</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 10.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 1.

<sup>306</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 10.

Her mission, he insists, is “to share that light with everyone.”<sup>307</sup> The Pope emphasises this point again at the conclusion of the Apostolic Exhortation, declaring that the Church’s only joy is to share with Asian peoples “the immense gift which she has received – the love of Jesus the Savior.”<sup>308</sup> These statements and disquisitions, together with the repeated use of the verb “to share” and its grammatical variants, give rise to our first and overall observation that it is the dynamics of faith as gift and evangelisation as task that underlines and unifies the entire Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*.

By emphasising that Jesus is the gift of faith, the post-synodal document retrieves and expands the Christological insights of *Lumen Gentium* and *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), the Pope’s very first encyclical and also “the programmatic document” of his entire pontificate.<sup>309</sup> By stressing that this gift must be shared, it captures and contextualises the missionary focus of the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), a document that “represents a new synthesis of the Church’s teaching about evangelization in the contemporary world,”<sup>310</sup> and at the same time, articulates his pastoral vision for the remaining fifteen years of his public life. These Christological and missionary concerns are the theological foundation of his gift/task logic and an expression of his contextual approach to the Church in Asia. They reveal that, more than being a philosopher,<sup>311</sup> a poet,<sup>312</sup> a playwright,<sup>313</sup> and a theologian,<sup>314</sup> John Paul

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 50.

<sup>309</sup> Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church actually starts with a Christological affirmation that “Christ is the light of humanity.” See *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

<sup>310</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994) 114.

<sup>311</sup> In their cover story on John Paul II as *Time*’s 1994 Man of the Year, the authors note that “the Pope’s reading is eclectic: philosophy, history, sociology – all in the original languages,” and that “Ratzinger is a theologian and John Paul is a philosopher” (Greg Burke, Thomas Sancton and Wilton Wynn, “Lives of the Pope,” *Time* [26 December 1994–2 January 1995] 34).

<sup>312</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999) 117–9.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>314</sup> According to Peter Hebblethwaite, “Cardinal Wojtyla did not consider himself to be a professional theologian. His real academic work was in ethical philosophy.” See *The New Inquisition: Schillebeeckx and Küng* (London: Collins, 1980) 110. Hebblethwaite notes that, in the 1970’s, “the Polish theological scene was rather unexciting,” and in the words of a native theologian, “Polish theologians always

II is first and foremost a Christian pastor, intent on being faithful to Jesus, the embodiment of the Christian message and tradition, and at the same time, one who is deeply concerned about the imperative of evangelising mission, the duty to share Jesus Christ the gift with all peoples of Asia in their own cultural and social environment. Therefore, to fully appreciate the many theological issues raised in *Ecclesia in Asia*, in particular those relating to the vocation and mission of the laity, one has to explore them with a double reference to the gift/task framework, and the Christological and missionary orientation.

In this post-synodal document, the Pope tends to employ interchangeably the terms “the Church in Asia,”<sup>315</sup> “Christians,”<sup>316</sup> “the faithful,”<sup>317</sup> “all the baptised,”<sup>318</sup> “Asian Christians,”<sup>319</sup> “Disciples of Christ,”<sup>320</sup> “Christian community,”<sup>321</sup> “Catholic community,”<sup>322</sup> and “the Church”<sup>323</sup> to mean the “people of God”<sup>324</sup> in Asia. These terms obviously include lay people who constitute ninety-nine per cent of the Church’s membership,<sup>325</sup> and who are the audience that the Pope intended to entrust

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appear on the battlefield after the battle is over’,” meaning that they tend to keep a safe distance from all controversy. See *ibid.*, 109; see also Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1999) 1-17.

<sup>315</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 1-4, 9-10, 18-20, 22, 25, 32, 34, 36, 48, 50.

<sup>316</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 23, 24, 30-32, 34, 40-42.

<sup>317</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 32, 35, 45.

<sup>318</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 43.

<sup>319</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 51.

<sup>320</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 50.

<sup>321</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

<sup>322</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 34.

<sup>323</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 2, 10, 20, 23, 24, 29, 32, 34-39, 42.

<sup>324</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 25, 31, 33, 42.

<sup>325</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, “Christians Must Make a Difference,” *The Tablet* (28 September 2002) 4. Reflecting on the laity, Irja Askola notes that “a layperson at least is tempted to adapt a remark attributed to Abraham Lincoln: the Lord must prefer them; that is why he made so many of them.” See “But I Cannot See the Salt! Five Vignettes on the Biblical Images of Laity,” *The Ecumenical Review* 45:4 (October 1993) 388-91.

in a special way the fruits of the Synod for Asia.<sup>326</sup> Therefore, while the identity of lay people and their specific role are discussed in greater detail in only three sections of the document,<sup>327</sup> the mission and ministry that he assigns to all “Asian Christians” will *ipso facto* apply to the laity. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, this mission is twofold: proclamation of Jesus as Lord,<sup>328</sup> and triple dialogue with the cultures,<sup>329</sup> the religions,<sup>330</sup> and the poor,<sup>331</sup> and its agents are the entire “witnessing Church,”<sup>332</sup> including pastors, religious, and the laity, in particular, the family and young people. By accenting the dual aspect of mission, the Pope has reiterated his previous teachings in chapter 5 of *Redemptoris Missio*. In this encyclical on missionary activity, he explains that “mission is a single but complex reality” which develops in “a variety of ways,”<sup>333</sup> encompassing witness as the first form of evangelisation,<sup>334</sup> proclamation, “the permanent priority of mission,”<sup>335</sup> which leads to conversion, baptism, and establishment of local Churches,<sup>336</sup> inculturation of the Gospel in different cultures,<sup>337</sup> interreligious dialogue,<sup>338</sup> and promotion of integral development and liberation by forming consciences.<sup>339</sup> The remarkable alignment between these two papal documents demonstrates that John Paul II has been quite consistent in his view on the

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<sup>326</sup> John Paul II, “Finding the Light,” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian publications, 2002) 59; *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 22.

<sup>327</sup> The titles of nos. 45, 46, and 47 are respectively “The Laity,” “The Family,” and “Young People.”

<sup>328</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 19, 20, 23.

<sup>329</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 21-22.

<sup>330</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 29-31.

<sup>331</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 34-38.

<sup>332</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 42.

<sup>333</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 41.

<sup>334</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 42-3.

<sup>335</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 44.

<sup>336</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 44-9.

<sup>337</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 52-4.

<sup>338</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 55-7.

<sup>339</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 58-9.

meaning, purpose, and importance of the evangelising mission as both proclamation and triple dialogue. What is innovative in the latter document is his constant juxtaposition of these elements of mission to the gift/task idea, a logic that enables him to express a profound gratitude for the grace that has been bestowed on the Church in Asia, and one that heightens his sense of urgency for the missionary task at hand. En route, he opens up a window into his understanding of how God's marvellous plan unfolds in Asia where the God of salvation has chosen to initiate his saving plan, and puts in context his fervent prayer that the third millennium will be a *kairos* for "a great harvest of faith to be reaped in the vast and vital continent."<sup>340</sup>

John Paul II often reiterated the gift/task logic in his speeches to and about the laity throughout his pontificate. In 1980, in a homily delivered in Accra, Ghana, he declared that the laity and all Christians have "a unique opportunity and crucial responsibility" to witness to the "the gift of faith, the tremendous privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord," which is also the greatest treasure and the greatest of all resources entrusted to them.<sup>341</sup> Speaking with the Canadian laity in 1984 he reminded them of "the general call to the apostolate which all Christians have received," and their "specific task of renewing the temporal order by permeating it with the spirit of the Gospel."<sup>342</sup> In a 1991 talk with Polish lay people, he encouraged them "to learn to recognize the gifts" they have received "in order to pass them on to others and in order to strive for them."<sup>343</sup> A couple of years later, reflecting on the topic of the possible participation of lay people in certain aspects of the ordained ministries he insisted that "every office, gift and task should be respected and put to good use."<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 1.

<sup>341</sup> John Paul II, "The Role of the Laity in Africa," *Origins* 10 (1980) 47.

<sup>342</sup> John Paul II, "The Laity's Call to Serve," *Origins* 14:16 (4 October 1984) 255.

<sup>343</sup> John Paul II, "Laity and Necessary Church Renewal in Poland," *Origins* 21:6 (20 June 1991) 97.

<sup>344</sup> John Paul II, "Do Laity Share in the Priest's Pastoral Ministry?" *Origins* 24:3 (2 June 1994) 41.



The gift/task principle is also a recurrent idea in his addresses on the laity given in general audiences between 27 October 1993 and 21 September 1994.<sup>345</sup> In an address on Jesus' earthly life as a model for lay people, he explained that "the call of the laity involves their sharing in the Church's life and, consequently, an intimate communion with Christ's very life. It is a divine gift and, at the same time, it has a correspondent duty."<sup>346</sup> Recalling *Lumen Gentium* (no. 36) and *Christifideles Laici* (no. 14) he affirmed that "living in the truth received from Christ and working to spread it in the world is thus a task and duty of all Church's members, including the laity."<sup>347</sup> Following the teachings of *Christifideles Laici* (no. 24) and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (no. 3) that charisms should be received in gratitude, and that each believer has the right and duty to use charisms, he emphasised that "this right is based on the Spirit's gift and the Church's validation. It is a duty stemming from the very fact of the gift received, which creates a responsibility and demands a commitment."<sup>348</sup> His predilection for the idea of gift extends also to his reflection on lay people and human life. For him, "The presence of children in the Church" is a gift,<sup>349</sup> "Old age is a gift,"<sup>350</sup> and "Life is always a gift."<sup>351</sup> Ten years later, pondering on the linkage between of holiness and credibility of proclamation, he declared that "holiness is not only a gift. It is also a task intrinsic and essential to discipleship, which shapes the whole of Christian life."<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998) 409-527. Hereafter, only the short title of the book is cited followed by relevant numbers.

<sup>346</sup> General audience of 10 November 1993, in John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community*, 418.

<sup>347</sup> General audience of 9 February 1994, in John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community*, 438.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>349</sup> General audience of 17 August 1994, in John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community*, 510.

<sup>350</sup> General audience of 7 September 1994, in John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community*, 521.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> John Paul II, "Holiness and the Credibility of the Church's Proclamation: 'Ad Limina' Address to Bishops From California, Nevada and Hawaii," *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004) 41.

These select quotations, taken from the speeches delivered over a period of two decades, show that by connecting the idea of faith as gift and evangelisation as task in *Ecclesia in Asia*, John Paul II has consistently applied a logic that had been central to his thinking. Quoting his own writings from a section of *Redemptoris Missio* that deals with the mission *ad gentes* and the gift of faith,<sup>353</sup> he warns that the Church and all its members “may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God’s bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind.”<sup>354</sup> He goes on to affirm that people “who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their obligation of *bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life* as a service to their brothers and sisters, as a fitting response to God” (italics in the original).<sup>355</sup> Here, for the first time in the Apostolic Exhortation (no. 10), the Pope introduces the term “witness” in conjunction with the themes of faith and Christian life in the context of the gift/task framework, and determines that witnessing to the gift of faith is the task of all Christians.

Indeed, like the gift/task idea, “witness” is one of the most striking and recurrent concepts in *Ecclesia in Asia*.<sup>356</sup> In a section devoted to lay people,<sup>357</sup> where the terms “missionaries,” “evangelisers,” “witnesses to Christ,” and “witnesses to the Gospel” are used interchangeably to describe their identity and vocation, John Paul II asserts that their proper role in the life and the mission of the Church consists in being “witnesses to Christ wherever they may find themselves.”<sup>358</sup> Indeed, by baptism and confirmation, lay people are called to be missionaries in the world “to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>359</sup> In addition to linking these concepts of witness and mission to the sacraments of initiation and the duty of proclamation, the Pope singles out dialogue with the poor (liberation and human development) as a unique role of lay

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<sup>353</sup> John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” no. 11, *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 545.

<sup>354</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 10.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*; see also John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” no. 11, *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 546.

<sup>356</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 10, 17, 18, 23, 41-46, 49.

<sup>357</sup> No. 45 of *Ecclesia in Asia* carries the heading “The Laity.”

<sup>358</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 45.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

people in “rooting out injustice and oppression” by “witnessing to the Gospel in every area of life in society.”<sup>360</sup> Our second observation is that the term “witness” or its various usages such as “witnessing,” “witnessing to the Gospel,” “witnesses to Christ,” and “witness of life” is a comprehensive concept that John Paul II employs to describe the identity and prescribe the role of the laity in Asia. Explained as a concrete expression of the integration of faith and daily living, it is closely connected to his conception of lay people as missionaries and witnesses to Christ.<sup>361</sup> Equated to Christian life and proclamation,<sup>362</sup> it explicates his insistence on the proclamation of Jesus as the unique and universal saviour. Prescribed as the primary mode of evangelisation, it is tightly coupled with the notion of faith and lies at the heart of *Ecclesia in Asia*. As such, it epitomises and summarises the contextual theology of the laity proposed in the Apostolic Exhortation.

In this post-synodal document, John Paul II endorses the recommendations of the Synod Fathers on evangelisation, and concurs that it is “a reality that is both rich and dynamic.”<sup>363</sup> He proceeds to enumerate its many aspects and elements, starting with the concept of witness,” including “witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implementation of the Church, inculturation and integral human promotion.”<sup>364</sup> As evangelisation is the overall theme of the Asian Synod and also the theological focus of *Ecclesia in Asia*, we argue that this loaded list demonstrates his genuine concerns for the priorities and sensibilities of the Asian bishops. It highlights all major tasks and challenges facing the Church in Asia, including an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ together with a detailed explanation of Christian doctrines and practices (catechesis), the necessity of being incorporated into an ecclesial community via conversion and baptism, the need to establish new communities of faith (implementation of the Church), the triple engagement with the religions (interreligious dialogue), the cultures (inculturation),

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 45-6, 42.

<sup>362</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 23, 20.

<sup>363</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

and the poor of Asia (integral human promotion), and finally, the primacy of leading a life worthy of Jesus Christ and his Gospel (witness).

The order of these elements shows that, in terms of pastoral priority, “witness” is the first and probably the most important of those aspects that are part and parcel of the multi-faceted reality of evangelisation. The list also places dialogue before proclamation, a clear indication that the Pope wishes to reflect the concerns of the Synod Fathers. He goes on to clarify that in the whole process of evangelisation “some of these elements proceed together, while others are successive steps and phases,” and in all evangelising work, “it is the complete truth of Jesus which must be proclaimed.”<sup>365</sup> Furthermore, he insists that “emphasizing certain aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Jesus is both legitimate and necessary in gradually introducing Christ to a person, but this cannot be allowed to compromise the integrity of the faith,”<sup>366</sup> which is based on “the person of Jesus Christ, as presented by the Church in every time and place.”<sup>367</sup> This gradual pedagogy of evangelisation,<sup>368</sup> no doubt informed by his acute appreciation of the concrete realities of Asia, is entirely consistent with his emphasis on the priority and necessity of witnessing to the Gospel. Here the Pope reiterates his emphasis in *Redemptoris Missio* that “the witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission,” which must be modelled on Christ who is “the ‘witness’ per excellence.”<sup>369</sup>

Therefore, for John Paul II, “there can be no true proclamation of the Gospel unless Christians also offer the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach.”<sup>370</sup> Everyone in the Church, he declares, “can and must bear this kind of *witness*,” and “genuine *Christian witness* is needed” today because people place “more trust in *witnesses* than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life

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<sup>365</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20.

<sup>369</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 42.

<sup>370</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 42.

and action than in theories,”<sup>371</sup> especially in Asia, “where people are more persuaded by *holiness of life* than by intellectual argument” (emphasis added).<sup>372</sup> Here, John Paul II seems to have used the term Christian witness to describe the concept of Christian holiness in the Asian context, a motif that is central to both *Lumen Gentium* and *Christifideles Laici*, and one that has generally been defined in these magisterial documents as the perfection of charity.

Elsewhere in the post-synodal document, the Pope emphasises that the credibility of proclamation derives from a living faith and that “Christians who speak of Christ must embody in their lives the message that they proclaim.”<sup>373</sup> He even considers Christian life or witness of life as proclamation.<sup>374</sup> For him, witnessing and proclamation go hand in hand, and both are animated by faith and inseparable from it. Faith, received as a gift, is the basis of the identity and vocation of Christians, and witnessing to Jesus Christ and proclaiming his Gospel are their task and mission in the Church and in the world of Asia. This faith demands sharing, and this gift entails task. In *Christifideles Laici* the Pope employs the gift/task logic to stress that ecclesial communion is both a gift and a task for lay people.<sup>375</sup> In *Ecclesia in Asia*, he contextually expands this logic as a recognition by the entire Church, especially the laity (who), of Jesus Christ the Saviour (why) as the gift that must be shared (what) with other peoples through “the joyful, patient and progressive preaching”<sup>376</sup> (when) by becoming authentic witnesses of life (how) in the world of Asia (where). The application of the gift/task logic underscores a key idea of *Ecclesia in Asia* that evangelisation is always “an ecclesial task which has to be carried out in communion with the whole community of faith.”<sup>377</sup> This emphasis leads to our third observation

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid. This text is based on *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 42, which states that evangelisation involves deeds rather than words, and that “people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in doctrine, and in life and action than in theories.”

<sup>373</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

<sup>376</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 2.

<sup>377</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 42.

that for John Paul II the identity, the vocation, and the ministry of lay people are understood only in the context of the Church as a witnessing community of faith, built on the two pillars of communion and mission.

In line with the teachings of Vatican II, John Paul II affirms that “the entire Church is missionary,” and “evangelisation is the duty of the whole People of God.”<sup>378</sup> Here the Pope repeats what he categorically stated in his 1990 Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Missio*: “I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”<sup>379</sup> In his view, the Church, “instituted by Christ and made present to the world by the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost” in accordance with the Father’s eternal plan, is the mystery of God’s loving design, made present and active in the community of the baptised Christians.<sup>380</sup> Therefore, it must be seen as “the privileged place of encounter between God and man,” a place in which God reveals the mystery of his inner life and carries out his plan of salvation for the world,<sup>381</sup> and not merely as “a social organization or agency of human welfare.”<sup>382</sup> For the Pope, at the heart of the mystery of the Church is the bond of communion which unites Christ to all the baptised.<sup>383</sup> Through this mystery of communion, Christians are united with God and with one another in the Holy Spirit.<sup>384</sup> From this theological perspective, the Pope insists that the primary purpose of the Church is to be the sacrament of “*the inner*

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<sup>378</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 42.

<sup>379</sup> John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” no. 3, *Origins* 20:34 (31 January 1991) 543.

<sup>380</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 24. Here the Pope simply reiterates what he has affirmed much earlier: “*the Church is, before everything else, a mystery*—...a response to the loving and saving plan of the Father, a prolongation of the incarnate Word’s mission, fruit of the Holy Spirit’s creative action.” See “Letter to Brazilian Episcopal Conference (Vatican City, April 9, 1986),” in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited with Introductions, Commentary and Translations by Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990) 499.

<sup>381</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 24.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

*union of the human person with God,”* and rooted in the union with God, it is also “*the unity of the human race*” (italics in the original).<sup>385</sup>

Within this ecclesiological framework, John Paul II makes explicit his view that “whoever enters into communion with the Lord is expected to bear fruit.”<sup>386</sup> He goes on to insist that communion with Jesus is “the indispensable condition for bearing fruit,” because communion with others is “the gift of Christ and his Spirit.”<sup>387</sup> In this sense, he explains, communion is “both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.”<sup>388</sup> Therefore, he is resolute in his view that “communion and mission are inseparably connected.”<sup>389</sup> Here, once again the Pope returns to the gift/task logic, this time considering communion as gift and mission as task, and hence situates the vocation and mission of all Christians, including the laity, within an ecclesiological framework that is built on two basic theological concepts of communion and mission.

Like *Christifideles Laici*, in this post-synodal document John Paul II unveils his understanding of the Church by using the concepts of mystery, community of faith, communion, and mission to explicate the nature and purpose of the Church.<sup>390</sup> But, unlike *Christifideles Laici*, which focuses on the role of the laity from a predominantly Trinitarian and ecclesiological perspective, *Ecclesia in Asia* provides a Christological and Pneumatological interpretation of the mission of the entire Church in Asia. Expressing this evangelising mission as proclamation (chapter 4, nos. 19-20, 23), and triple dialogue, namely, inculturation (chapter 4, nos. 21-22), communion and dialogue (chapter 5), and human promotion (chapter 6), often within the gift/task

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<sup>385</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 24.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> The Pope emphasises this point barely two months after the conclusion of the Asian Synod. See John Paul II, “Annual Address to the Roman Curia,” *Origins* 17 (28 January 1988) 575. Repeating the words of Paul VI in *Christifideles Laici* (no. 19), he speaks of the Church as *sanctorum communio*, a term that refers to “a double, life-giving participation ... union with Christ and in Christ, and unity among Christians in the church.” See also *Christifideles Laici*, nos. 18, 64.

framework, it stresses the distinctive role of lay people, in particular women, the family, and young people, as witnesses to the Gospel in the world of Asia (chapter 7, nos. 45, 46, 47).

For John Paul II, “there is no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord.”<sup>391</sup> To bear witness to Christ, he affirms, is “the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia.”<sup>392</sup> He recognises that “the effort to share the gift of faith in Jesus as the only Saviour is fraught with philosophical, cultural and theological difficulties.”<sup>393</sup> However, he insists that the Church proclaims the Good News with respect for the rights of consciences and esteem for her listeners.<sup>394</sup>

Recalling what Paul VI describes as the drama of our time, namely “the split between the Gospel and culture,” and convinced that “the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of inculturation of the Christian faith in Asia,”<sup>395</sup> John Paul II insists that inculturation of the Gospel must involve all members of the Church, especially lay people, “who are called to transform society” by infusing Christian values “into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the secular world in which they live.”<sup>396</sup> Dialogue with this contemporary world is “an essential part of the Church’s mission” because it has “its origin in the Father’s loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>397</sup> The Church’s dialogue is directed first of all to other Christians, aiming to promote Christian unity.<sup>398</sup> Dialogue with the followers of other religions is also “a part of the Church’s evangelising mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*.”<sup>399</sup> It is a task incumbent on the whole Church and is guided by

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<sup>391</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 19.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>395</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 21.

<sup>396</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 22.

<sup>397</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 29.

<sup>398</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 29-30.

<sup>399</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 31.



the principles enunciated in the Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate*.<sup>400</sup> The Pope emphasises that Christians engaged in interreligious dialogue must bring “the firm belief that the fullness of salvation comes from Christ alone, and that the Church community to which they belong is the *ordinary means* of salvation.”<sup>401</sup> Repeating what he wrote to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,<sup>402</sup> and recalling the teachings of Pope Paul VI,<sup>403</sup> he asserts that acknowledging “whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people” does not lessen “the Church’s duty and resolve to proclaim Jesus Christ” as the way, the truth and the life, nor cancel “the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.”<sup>404</sup> With an explicit reference to the gift/task principle, he concludes his reflection on interreligious dialogue by encouraging Christians to “recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ” so that they may be able “to communicate that gift to others through *proclamation* and *dialogue*” (italics in the original).<sup>405</sup> We will argue that this statement provides a key for understanding John Paul II’s thought on proclamation and interreligious dialogue, a vexing issue facing the Churches in Asia.

In addition to proclamation, inculturation, and interreligious dialogue, Asian Christians are also called to engage in the dialogue with the poor by living “a communion of life which shows itself particularly in loving service to the poor and defenceless,”<sup>406</sup> by adopting “a preferential love of the poor and the voiceless,”<sup>407</sup> and

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<sup>400</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 31.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to the Delegates [of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences],” *FABC Papers No. 59*, (Hong Kong: FABC, 1990) 4.

<sup>403</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 53.

<sup>404</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 31; see also John Paul II, “Letter to the Delegates [of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences],” *FABC Papers No. 59*, (Hong Kong: FABC, 1990) 1-6.

<sup>405</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 31.

<sup>406</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 32.

<sup>407</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 34.

by promoting human dignity.<sup>408</sup> As human beings are “the prime agents and destination of development,” the Church seeks to promote the kind of development that “begins and ends with the dignity of the human person created in the image of God and endowed with a God-given dignity and inalienable human rights.”<sup>409</sup> Here the strong link between *Redemptoris Missio* and *Ecclesia in Asia* is emphasised again. In the encyclical he highlights the necessity of proclaiming Christ as a means of restoring human dignity,<sup>410</sup> and states the importance of all Christians “taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power” in order to “serve the poorest of the poor.”<sup>411</sup> In the post-synodal document, he insists that all members of the Church, especially the laity, who are engaged in human promotion, which is “fundamentally a human and moral question,” and not simply a technical and economic endeavour, must have a firm understanding of the social doctrine of the Church.<sup>412</sup> Recalling the gift/task principle once again, he makes explicit his view that “the service of human development begins with the service of life,” because “life is a great gift to us by God,” and God entrusts it to us as “a project and responsibility.”<sup>413</sup>

John Paul II singles out women, the family, and young people as witnesses of evangelisation, the supreme duty that consists of both proclamation and triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions and the people, especially the poor, of Asia. Concurring with the Synod Fathers, he insists that the Church should be “a

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<sup>408</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 33.

<sup>409</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 33. Commenting on the text of *Gaudium et Spes*, Joseph Ratzinger notes that, “With Augustine (*De Trinitate*, XIV, 8, 11) the image of God is interpreted as capacity for God, qualification to know and love God.” See “The Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 5, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 121.

<sup>410</sup> B. Pottier suggests that “si l’on compare *Pacem in terris* de Jean XXIII or *Populorum progressio* de Paul VI aux encycliques de Jean-Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* ou *Laborem exercens* par exemple, ce qui frappe immédiatement dès la simple lecture de leur titres, c’est le ton résolument personnaliste de Jean-Paul II. Personnaliste lorsqu’il parle de l’homme et christocentrique lorsqu’il parle de Dieu: son attachement à la personne humaine concrète dérive de son attachement à la personne du Verbe, Fils de Dieu fait homme” (“Vatican II et Jean-Paul II,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 107:3 [1985] 370).

<sup>411</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 43.

<sup>412</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 32.

<sup>413</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 35.

participatory Church,” with “the wider participation of women in the life and mission of the Church,” who can bring to Asian people, “especially the poor and marginalized,” an image of “the compassionate Jesus, the healer and reconciler.”<sup>414</sup> Christian families are also called to be witnesses to the Gospel, and to be effective agents of evangelisation, they need to be “genuinely ‘the domestic Church’, humbly and lovingly living out the Christian vocation.”<sup>415</sup> This means in practice that they have to be “active in parish life, partaking of the sacraments,” and “being in service to others.”<sup>416</sup> Finally, for the Pope, young people are agents and co-workers in the Church’s mission of love and service.<sup>417</sup> To be effective agents of evangelisation, they will need pastoral care and require appropriate formation.<sup>418</sup>

Three observations summarise our review of the theology of the laity in *Ecclesia in Asia*. First, by repeatedly applying the idea of faith as gift and evangelisation as task to define and describe the mission of the Church in Asia, John Paul II has effectively used the gift/task logic to underline and unify the entire post-synodal document. This logic is intimately linked to a theological motif expounded in *Christifideles Laici*, which postulates that baptismal identity and dignity of Christians, flowing from their faith in Jesus Christ, are the basis of their vocation and mission. The progression from *Christifideles Laici* to *Ecclesia in Asia* can also be discerned in the Pope’s accent on the concept of witness of life as the primary mode of evangelisation for Asian Christians, especially the laity. Equated to proclamation, this comprehensive concept is his preferred *locus* to condense and expand his theology of the laity in the post-synodal document. Finally, by considering that the evangelising mission of the witnessing Church as communion and mission, which is incumbent on all members of the Church, has as its fundamental elements both an explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord, and a triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia, he

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<sup>414</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 45.

<sup>415</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 46. Here John Paul II reiterates what he affirmed in 1981 that “the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called ‘the domestic Church’.” *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 21.

<sup>416</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 46.

<sup>417</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 47.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*

proved to be a contextual theologian who remains faithful to Vatican II and at the same time is sensitive to the demands of the Church in Asia. Here lies one of John Paul II's most powerful theological syntheses, which addresses a critical issue confronting the Asian Church, namely the relationship between evangelisation and interfaith dialogue.<sup>419</sup> However, while his view on interreligious dialogue is widely welcome in Asia,<sup>420</sup> his insistence on the need to explicitly proclaim Jesus as the universal and only saviour in the Asian milieu has created upset in some theological quarters. Indeed, this contentious issue has received considerable attention from Catholic theologians,<sup>421</sup> and generated a vigorous theological debate, which had already begun in earnest with the publication of *Proclamation and Dialogue*,<sup>422</sup> a

<sup>419</sup> Michael Barnes notes that "'inter-faith' and 'inter-religious' tend to be used interchangeably; the former has inter-personal, the latter more inter-systemic, connotations" (*Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* [Cambridge: University Press, 2002] 3). For him, "in principle faith is always 'inter-faith'." Ibid., 4. Peter C. Phan seems to employ these terms interchangeably as well. See the title of his classic book, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004). For Michael Amaladoss, "interreligious dialogue is primarily not between religions but between believers" ("Rationales for Dialogue Among World Religions," *Origins* 19: 35 [1 February 1990] 575).

<sup>420</sup> George Gispert-Sauch highlights "the depth and seriousness of an ongoing interreligious dialogue" as one of the main features of Asian theology: "In the beginning was the Logos", St John tells us. But Asia tends to interpret this as follows: 'In the beginning there is a dia-logos'." See "Asian Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by David F. Ford (New York: Blackwell, 1997) 472.

<sup>421</sup> See, for instance, Peter C. Phan, "Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 249-61; John Mansford Prior, "Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*," *ibid.*, 236-48; Luis Antonio Tagle, "The Challenges of Mission in Asia: A View from the Asian Synod," *ibid.*, 212-21; Michael Amaladoss, "Mission in Asia: A Reflection on *Ecclesia in Asia*," *ibid.*, 222-35; *idem*, "Pluralism of Religions and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Asia," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 56 (2001) 1-14; Edmund Chia, "Of Fork and Spoon or Fingers and Chopsticks: Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 273-83; this paper also appears in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37:3 (2000) 243-55, and as "Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*" in *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000) 300-12; Jacques Dupuis, "FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission in Asia Today," *Vidyajyoti* 56:9 (1992) 449-68. G. Gispert-Sauch, "John Paul II: Christology, Dialogue, Mission," *Jeevadhara* 35:209 (2005) 371-80; Jacob Kavunkal, "Church and Mission in Asia in the Light of *Ecclesia in Asia*: A Critical Study," *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000) 290-9; *idem*, "Mission and Inter Religious Dialogue in the Teachings of John Paul II," *Jeevadhara* 35:209 (Sept 2005) 381-9; J. Neuner, "Ecclesia in Asia: Towards a New Theology of Proclamation," *Third Millennium* 3(2000) 110-6; *idem*, "Mission Theology After Vatican II: Magisterial Teaching and Missiological Approaches in India," *Vidyajyoti* 58:4 (1994) 201-14; *idem*, "Proclaiming Jesus Christ: Reflections on *Ecclesia in Asia*," *Vidyajyoti* 64 (2000) 536-43; Jonathan Y. Tan, "From 'Missio ad gentes' to 'Missio inter Gentes'. I: Shaping a New Paradigm for Doing Christian Mission in Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 68:9 (September 2004) 670-86; "From 'Missio ad gentes' to 'Missio inter Gentes'. II: Shaping a New Paradigm for Doing Christian Mission in Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 69:1 (January 2005) 27-41.

<sup>422</sup> The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," *Origins* 21:8 (4 July 1991) 121, 123-135. Following John Paul II, *Dialogue and Proclamation* explains the threefold theological foundation of interreligious

document jointly prepared by two Roman dicasteries, and further intensified with the release of *Dominus Iesus*, a document produced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.<sup>423</sup> Some of these scholars at times prefer to contrast rather than compare the Pope's views with those of the FABC,<sup>424</sup> and as a result, have focused more on differences rather than common points between the theologies of evangelising mission according to John Paul II and the Asian bishops. As the whole Church is missionary by nature, and evangelisation is the vocation and mission of all Christians, it is fitting to revisit this debate on proclamation and dialogue in the next section as a prelude and background discussion to our comparative assessment of their theologies of the laity.<sup>425</sup>

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dialogue: the common origin and common destiny of human beings created in the image of God, the "one plan of salvation for humankind, with its center in Jesus Christ," and "the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of the members of the other religious traditions." Ibid., no. 28, p. 127.

<sup>423</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration 'Dominus Iesus': On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church," *Origins* 30:14 (14 September 2000) 209, 211-24. Medard Kehl states that "the document's primary aim is to reject tendencies that relativize faith in the unique significance of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all people" ("The One Church and the Many Churches," *Theology Digest* 49:1 [Spring 2002] 29). For a helpful discussion of this document in reference to Vatican II and the FABC, see respectively, Aloysius Pieris, "The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican's *Dominus Iesus*," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38:3 (2001) 207-30, and Edmund Chia, "FABC's 'Response' to *Dominus Iesus*," ibid., 231-7; see also *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, edited by Stephen J. Hope and Charles Hefling (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), and James Fredericks, "The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths: Rejecting Nothing That is True and Holy," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003) 225-54. For a good summary of the reactions to this document, both within and outside the Catholic Church, see Richard P. McBrien, "Dominus Iesus: An Ecclesiological Critique" (available on [www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org), accessed 28 March 2003), and Douglas Clark, "Dominus Iesus: The Document and the 'Spin'," *The Living Light* 376:3 (Spring 2001) 41-6. Both Peter C. Phan and Michael Amaladoss reported a rumour that some Asian theologians have been the target of *Dominus Iesus*. See Peter C. Phan, "The Next Christianity," *America* (3 February 2003) 11; Michael Amaladoss, Review of *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, edited by Stephen J. Pope and Charles Hefling, *Theological Studies* 64:2 (June 2003) 425. For Jacques Dupuis, *Dominus Iesus* is "a big step back." See Clifford Longley, "Dialogue at the Deepest Level," *The Tablet* (22 March 2008) 19.

<sup>424</sup> See, for instance, Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, "From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 68-101. As the purpose and scope of this essay (ibid., 68-9) is basically the same as his two-part article published a year earlier in the *Journal of Theological Reflection Vidyajyoti*, we will refer only to the 2004 paper. See idem., "Approaches to Christian Mission in Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 67:3 (March 2003) 214-5; "Approaches to Christian Mission in Asia. II," *Vidyajyoti* 67:4 (April 2003) 272-84.

<sup>425</sup> Vatican officials urge that "specific studies on the relationship between dialogue and proclamation be undertaken, taking into account each religion within its geographical area and its socio-cultural context" (The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," no. 88, *Origins* 21:8 [4 July 1991] 135).

#### 8.4 From Divergence to Convergence: John Paul II's Theology of the Laity and the Theology of the Asian Bishops

For John Paul II it is an inescapable responsibility of the Church in Asia to proclaim Jesus as Lord and be actively engaged in the threefold dialogue with the peoples, the cultures, and the religions of the continent. In this section we argue that by advocating the double mission of evangelisation as proclamation and triple dialogue, in particular, interreligious dialogue, John Paul II has adopted a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” approach, and in the process, provides a most balanced synthesis of mission theology for Asia. This theological posture is fundamentally a contextual approach in the sense that it aims to be faithful to the tradition by an emphasis on proclamation, a duty that flows from Christ’s own command,<sup>426</sup> hence belonging to the nature and *raison d’être* of the Church, and at the same time, endeavours to be sensitive and adaptive to the situations of Asia by supporting a strategy of triple dialogue in the Asian context. As a methodology that is both theologically firm (*fortiter*) on goals and pastorally flexible (*suaviter*) on means, it provides a plausible explanation to the Pope’s theology of evangelisation, one that is built on two pillars of proclamation and triple dialogue. This approach also provides a framework to harmonise the seemingly opposing views of *Ecclesia in Asia* and the statements of the Asian bishops, in particular the final statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC, which have often been brought into relief by scholars who hold strong views on the subject.

To support these arguments our starting point will be two inspiring statements of *Redemptoris Missio*, an encyclical that John Paul II relies heavily to articulate his mission theology in *Ecclesia in Asia*.<sup>427</sup> In the first statement, the Pope emphasises the need to unite two types of proclamation: “the proclamation of the kingdom of God (the content of Jesus’ own *kerygma*) and the proclamation of the Christ event (the *kerygma* of the apostles).”<sup>428</sup> For him “after the resurrection, the disciples preach the

<sup>426</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20; see also Mt 28:18-20, Mk 16:15-6, Lk 24:46-8, Jn 14:6, 20:21, and Acts 1:8.

<sup>427</sup> There are at least 19 direct and indirect references to *Redemptoris Missio* in *Ecclesia in Asia*.

<sup>428</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 16.

kingdom by proclaiming Jesus crucified and risen from death,” hence, “the two proclamations are complementary; each throws light on the other.”<sup>429</sup> In the second, John Paul II teaches that “the Spirit’s presence and activity,” which are “universal, limited neither by space nor time,” “affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.”<sup>430</sup> In *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope clarifies this doctrine by affirming that “the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from universal salvation of Jesus,” and “the presence of the Spirit in creation and history points to Jesus Christ in whom creation and history are redeemed and fulfilled.”<sup>431</sup> In his view, “the Holy Spirit’s universal presence can never be separated from his activity within the body of Christ, the Church,”<sup>432</sup> and “whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit.”<sup>433</sup> We will conclude that there is more convergence and agreement than divergence and disagreement in the theologies of the laity according to John Paul II and the FABC, and, despite the intense debate on the subject of Christian mission, which has at times verged on a polarisation into evangelisation-as-proclamation and evangelisation-as-triple dialogue, the similitude between their perspectives on evangelisation in Asia and the role of lay people, is more pronounced than their perceived differences. The task of this section is twofold. First, it reviews the state of the question and unfolds John Paul II’s theology of evangelisation with a focus on proclamation and interreligious dialogue and in reference to the statements of the FABC. Secondly, it provides a comparative assessment of their theologies of the laity.

John Paul II’s theology of evangelising mission has often been seen as ambivalent. This ambivalence is due to the fact that, on the one hand, he emphasises the need to respect what the Spirit does in the histories, cultures, and religions of all peoples. On

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28.

<sup>431</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 16.

<sup>432</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 16; *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28.

<sup>433</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28; see also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16.

the other hand, he affirms that Jesus Christ is the only way, truth, and life for humankind, and the Church is the ordinary means of salvation.<sup>434</sup> In fact, choosing the theme of the Synod, John Paul II wanted the Synod to “illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one mediator between God and man and the sole redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions.”<sup>435</sup> Commentators on his document *Ecclesia in Asia* generally concur that the real issue confronting the Church in Asia is not the *who*, *what* or *why* of mission, but *how*.<sup>436</sup> Like these Asian theologians, the Pope is also acutely aware of the importance of the *how* of mission. Thus, he writes, “the great question now facing the Church in Asia is *how* to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely the Good News of Jesus Christ” (italics in the original).<sup>437</sup> In his view, “the new evangelization, as a call to conversion, grace and wisdom, is the only genuine hope for a better world and a brighter future. The question is not whether the Church has something essential to say to the men and women of our time, but *how* she can say it clearly and convincingly” (emphasis added).<sup>438</sup> Therefore, what needs to be asked is why the Pope is fully aware of the difficulties facing the Church in Asia, but continues to insist on the need for Asian Christians to explicitly proclaim that Jesus is the universal and only saviour. By focusing mainly on the doctrinal aspects of his theology of evangelisation, many Asian theologians have generally assessed the Pope’s view on evangelisation in his

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<sup>434</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 31.

<sup>435</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 2.

<sup>436</sup> Edmund Chia, “Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*,” *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000) 300-1; J. Neuner, “*Ecclesia in Asia*: Towards a New Theology of Proclamation,” *Third Millennium* 3(2000) 113; idem, “Proclaiming Jesus Christ: Reflections on *Ecclesia in Asia*,” *Vidyajyoti* 64 (2000) 542; Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 81-6; idem., “From ‘*Missio ad gentes*’ to ‘*Missio inter Gentes*’. I. [sic]: Shaping a New Paradigm for Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *Vidyajyoti* 68:9 (September 2004) 671; Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 255; John Mansford Prior, “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*,” *ibid.*, 239-41.

<sup>437</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 19.

<sup>438</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 29.



capacity as a theologian rather than as a theologian *cum* pastor,<sup>439</sup> and in the process accented the differences rather than the similarities between his theology of evangelisation and that of the FABC. This requires remedy because of the importance of proclamation and dialogue in the Asian context, their profound implications for the Churches in Asia, and their prominence in *Ecclesia in Asia* and the documents of the Asian bishops.

In a brilliant essay on approaches to doing mission in Asia,<sup>440</sup> Jonathan Tan Yun-ka provides a helpful exposition and evaluation of John Paul II's mission theology in contrast to theologies of the FABC by making a series of observations, which are bolstered by many direct and lengthy quotations from several prominent Catholic theologians who have written extensively on the subject.<sup>441</sup> First, the author argues that the focus of *Ecclesia in Asia* is Christocentric with an emphasis on the need "to focus on the verbal, explicit proclamation of the uniqueness and necessity of Christ for the salvation of the world."<sup>442</sup> This focus is different from the approach adopted

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<sup>439</sup> It is worth recalling an insightful remark made by G. Philips, a prominent *peritus* at Vatican II: "Le vrai théologien aura toujours de quelque manière une âme de père et de pasteur" ("Deux tendances dans la théologie contemporaine," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 85:3 [1963] 238).

<sup>440</sup> This essay was partly based on his dissertation "'Missio ad Gentes' in Asia: A Comparative Study of the Missiology of John Paul II and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2002.

<sup>441</sup> Theologians quoted in this essay include Michael Amaladoss, William Burrows, Edmund Chia, Donal Dorr, Jacob Kavunkal, James Kroeger, Josef Neuner, Peter C. Phan, Aloysius Pieris, John Mansford Prior, Aylward Shorter, and Felix Wilfred. It is noteworthy that Tan did not quote Jacques Dupuis, a *cause célèbre* under a two-year investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for his magisterial work *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997). One of the main arguments in this *magnum opus*, which proposes a Trinitarian Christology model to address issues relating to the interreligious context of today, is that in God's providence religious pluralism exists not merely *de facto* but also *de jure*. For an analysis of the regulations (issued on 29 June 1997) governing this case, see Ladislav Orsy, "Justice Begins at Home," *The Tablet* (16 January 1999) 78-81. For details on the outcome of the case, see The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Notification Regarding Father Dupuis' *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*," *Origins* 30:38 (8 March 2001) 605, 607-8, and Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, "Jesuit Superior General's Statement on Vatican Notification Regarding Father Dupuis' Book," *ibid.*, 608-9. For an insight into a theological exchange between Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of this Congregation, and Cardinal Franz König, who defended Dupuis, see Franz König, "In defence of Fr Dupuis," *The Tablet* (16 January 1999) 76-7, and Joseph Ratzinger, "Cardinal Ratzinger Replies," *The Tablet* (13 March 1999) 385. Unlike many of these theologians, Dupuis argues that there is "substantial agreement," a view that we share, between the documents of the FABC and *Redemptoris Missio*, an encyclical that John Paul II often refers to in *Ecclesia in Asia*. See "FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission in Asia Today," *Vidyajyoti* 55:9 (September 1992) 468.

<sup>442</sup> Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, "From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 73. Jacob Kavunkal argues that "proclamation of Jesus Christ as the one and only

by the Asian bishops who “are more interested in exploring how Christ’s salvific message relates to the deep soteriological dimensions of Asian cultures and religions.”<sup>443</sup> Secondly, while John Paul II teaches that “the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from universal salvation in Jesus,”<sup>444</sup> the FABC concurs with the Pope that “there is only one economy of salvation,” but prefers to adopt a different view in which “Christ is subsumed within the Spirit.”<sup>445</sup> Thirdly, the Pope takes “a linear and evolutionary view of salvation history,”<sup>446</sup> and subscribes to a fulfilment theory,<sup>447</sup> which postulates that “other religions are fulfilled in Christianity.”<sup>448</sup> Fourthly, the Pope seems to perceive “dialogue as *preparatio evangelica*, in the sense that dialogue is linked with proclamation, and should lead to

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Saviour is the chief concern” of *Ecclesia in Asia*, which refers to Jesus as the ‘only Saviour’ or the ‘Redeemer’ nearly 30 times within the first 21 numbers. See “Church and Mission in Asia in the Light of *Ecclesia in Asia*: A Critical Study,” *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000) 291.

<sup>443</sup> Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 74.

<sup>444</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 16.

<sup>445</sup> Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 77.

<sup>446</sup> Commenting on no. 14 of *Ecclesia in Asia* Michael Amaladoss detects “a paradigm of preparation-fulfillment.” See “Mission in Asia: A Reflection on *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 223. He also notes that *Ecclesia in Asia* “operates with a linear view of history of salvation,” which considers Jesus and Christianity “as the fulfillment of the other religions.” See “The Image of Jesus in the *Church in Asia*,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37:3 (2000) 236. For a brief discussion of the adoption of the “framework of preparation-fulfillment” by Indian Christians from 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Michael Amaladoss, “Progress in India,” *America* (24 October 2005) 18.

<sup>447</sup> John Mansford Prior observes that “the theology of religions in *Ecclesia in Asia* follows the fulfilment theory.” See “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 241. The FABC also seems to adopt this fulfilment theory by affirming that “the Church as the Sacrament of union with God and of the unity of all humankind has the mission to promote in various ways the fulfilment which is God’s will and gift for all persons in Christ.” See BIRA III, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. I*, 120.

<sup>448</sup> Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 78-80. Going beyond this one-way understanding of the fulfilment theory, Gavin D’Costa proposes a dialectical interpretation by postulating that it is also the Church that is fulfilled in interacting with other religions. See “Gavin D’Costa’s Trinitarian Theology of Religions,” *Louvain Studies* 30 (2005) 308.

a proclamation of the fullness of salvation alone.”<sup>449</sup> Fifthly, while recognising “the important role of life-witness” the Pope “does not expand on the life-witness approach,” but prefers “to speak of proclamation with its focus on theory, argument, teaching and confrontation.”<sup>450</sup> In contrast with the “essentialist approach” of John Paul II, which “presupposes an unchanging deposit of truth,”<sup>451</sup> the FABC is more at home with life-witness as “the Asian way of proclaiming the Christian Gospel in Asia.”<sup>452</sup> Finally, unlike the Asian bishops who adopt “a combined *inductive-deductive* approach,” which starts from “the life experiences of the Asian peoples,” and “working its way back to the Church’s dogmatic and creedal traditions,” John Paul II opts for “a *deductive* method of theology,” which begins “from basic, a priori abstract assertions to conclusion, from general, universal principles to particular situations.”<sup>453</sup> Therefore, in contrast to the Pope’s emphasis on proclamation “as the primary task of mission,” which takes precedence over life-witness and dialogue,<sup>454</sup> the bishops of Asia accent “a threefold dialogue with the life-realities of myriad cultures, religions and economic-political realities,”<sup>455</sup> and “see dialogue as the only viable means of mission.”<sup>456</sup>

Notwithstanding the merit of, and the profit from, these scholarly labours, John Paul II’s contextual approach to evangelisation in Asia is yet to be plumbed for a more plausible explanation. For John Paul II, the theologian *cum* pastor, “in the light of the economy of salvation, the church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and

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<sup>449</sup> Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 81.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-5.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. The bishops of Asia affirm that “the most effective means of evangelization and service in the name of Christ has always been and continues to be the witness of life.” See FABC VII, art. Part II.C.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 12.

<sup>453</sup> Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 89-90.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

engaging in interreligious dialogue.”<sup>457</sup> His explicit instruction to Asian Christians is to “recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ” so that they may be able “to communicate that gift to others through *proclamation* and *dialogue*” (italics in the original).<sup>458</sup> We argue that this statement, with a deliberate emphasis on the terms proclamation and dialogue, and their order of priority, provides a key for understanding the Pope’s mission theology in Asia.

To resolve the vexing issue associated with John Paul II’s insistence that the Church in Asia must proclaim Jesus as the only saviour, Peter C. Phan proceeds from the perspective of preaching and catechesis rather than theology, and notes that “the immediate goal of the proclamation of the gospel is to enable a person to accept Jesus as his or her ‘personal Savior’.”<sup>459</sup> For him “it is this personal and total commitment of the catechumen to Jesus that is being promoted, not the rejection of the *possible* ways in which God can reach *other* people, a possibility that can no longer be denied after Vatican II. The vital question before all else is not whether and how *other* people can be saved but *how I* can fully enter a personal relationship with God” (emphasis in the original).<sup>460</sup> S.J Emmanuel, on the other hand, emphasises the communitarian aspect of proclamation stating that “the new missionary activity ... is a proclamation and invitation to live the gospel as a community becoming church.”<sup>461</sup> These statements amplify beautifully the view of the Asian bishops who affirm that “the

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<sup>457</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 55.

<sup>458</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 31. This “twofold commitment” was also made explicit in a 1991 Vatican document which states that “all Christians are called to be personally involved in these two ways of carrying out the one mission of the church, namely proclamation and dialogue.” See The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” nos. 82, 89 *Origins* 21:8 (4 July 1991) 134-5.

<sup>459</sup> Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 256.

<sup>460</sup> Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 256. For a summary of Phan’s theology of religions and ecclesiology see David M. Coffey, “A Trinitarian Response to Issues Raised by Peter Phan,” *Theological Studies* 69:4 (December 2008) 854-9. This summary is based on chapters 4, 9, and 5 of Phan’s *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), a book that was “subjected to investigation by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and the Committee on Doctrine for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).” *Ibid.*, 852.

<sup>461</sup> S.J. Emmanuel, “Asian Mission for the Next Millennium? Chances and Challenges,” *The Way* (April 1999) 108.

primary task of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *calling to a personal faith* in Him, inviting to *membership in the Church* those whom God has chosen, and celebrating salvation through Christ in our belonging to His Church. Every other task of the Church flows from and is related to this proclamation and its acceptance in faith” (emphasis added).<sup>462</sup> This statement of the FABC leads us to make another observation that there is a fundamental agreement between *Ecclesia in Asia* and the documents of the FABC on the primacy of proclamation.

Indeed, at the “All-Asian Conference on Evangelization” held in Suwon, South Korea in 1988, the Asian bishops asserted that “the ultimate goal of all evangelization is the ushering in and establishment of God’s Kingdom,” and while evangelisation has many essential aspects such as “witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of the Kingdom,” and the triple dialogue with the poor, the cultures, and the religions of Asia, “there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ,” and “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.”<sup>463</sup> For them, “to be at the service of the Kingdom means for the Church to announce Jesus Christ.”<sup>464</sup> They emphasised this point at the Fifth Plenary Assembly in 1990 and added that “proclamation *through* dialogue and deeds” is the “the first

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<sup>462</sup> BIMA IV [misprinted as BIMA I, held in 1978 in The Philippines, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 93], art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

<sup>463</sup> BIMA IV, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292; see also BIMA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104. This idea is supported by an inter-dicastery document, which asserts that interreligious dialogue and proclamation, both authentic elements of the Church’s evangelisation, are “not on the same level.” See The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” no. 77, *Origins* 21:8 (4 July 1991) 133. Miguel Marcelo Quatra also places the Kingdom of God at the centre of all activities of the Church’s evangelising mission, but contends that “any attempt to place the various activities in hierarchical order with proclamation at the top, gives an unbalanced picture which does not correspond to reality.” See *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents (1970-1995)*, (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000) 193. Earlier, Michael Amaladoss cautioned against a narrow understanding of evangelisation “as proclamation leading to baptism and, what is worse, look upon other types of activity as merely means or first steps to proclamation.” See *Making All Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism, and Evangelization in Asia* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990) 57.

<sup>464</sup> OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization, Dialogue and Proclamation,” art. 33, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 201. At a symposium on evangelisation in 2002, using the gift/task logic of *Ecclesia in Asia*, the FABC declared that “the good news of Jesus that we bear is our most precious gift to Asia,” and “to share him with others is the ultimate reason for all our pastoral activity. This mission is a faith imperative.” [OE], “Evangelization in Asia: Final Statement of FABC Symposium,” art. 4, *Origins* 32:16 (26 September 2002) 273.

call to the Churches in Asia” (emphasis added).<sup>465</sup> The convergence between the Pope and the FABC on the primacy of proclamation and the importance of dialogue is also expounded by veteran theologians such as Jacques Dupuis, Peter C. Phan, and S.J. Emmanuel.

Contrary to the general thrust of Jonathan Tan’s essay, Dupuis argues that there is a “substantial agreement” on the centrality and priority of the proclamation of Jesus Christ, a view that we are in deep agreement with, between the documents of the FABC over the first two decades and the teachings of John Paul II, especially his *Redemptoris Missio*, an encyclical that the Pope often refers to in *Ecclesia in Asia*.<sup>466</sup> Likewise, for Peter C. Phan, “ever since its first plenary assembly in Taipei, Taiwan, 1974, the FABC has repeatedly insisted that the *primary task* of the Asian Churches is the proclamation of the gospel. But it has also maintained no less frequently that *the way* to fulfil this task in Asia is by way of dialogue, indeed a triple dialogue with Asian cultures, Asian religions and the Asians themselves, especially the poor” (emphasis added).<sup>467</sup> In the same article, he expands this idea by stressing that “the new focus of the Church’s mission must be the light guiding the ordering of its priorities and the choice of its policies, which must not aim at serving the internal interests of the Church but the proclamation of the gospel *through* the triple dialogue” (emphasis added).<sup>468</sup> Discussing proclamation in the context of the United States with insights from the FABC, Phan states that “it is *through* this triple dialogue ... that the Church in Asia performs its evangelizing mission and thus becomes the local church. Hence, dialogue is not a substitute for proclamation or evangelization; rather, it is *the way*, indeed the most effective way, in which the proclamation of the good news is

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<sup>465</sup> FABC V, art. 4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282.

<sup>466</sup> Jacques Dupuis, “FABC Focus on the Church’s Evangelising Mission in Asia Today,” *Vidyajyoti* 55:9 (September 1992) 468.

<sup>467</sup> Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity,” in *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004) 179. This paper also appeared in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 255.

<sup>468</sup> Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 256-7.

done in Asia” (emphasis added).<sup>469</sup> These perceptive remarks and the statements of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC mentioned above, which are peppered with words such as “through” and “the way,” point to a clear distinction between the goal and the means of mission, with proclamation as the objective, and dialogue and witness as the ways. S.J. Emmanuel also refers to this distinction by a discussion of “proclamation and/through the three dialogues.”<sup>470</sup> In our view, this essential distinction would permit a more fruitful reading of *Ecclesia in Asia*.

Therefore, to fully understand John Paul II’s theology of evangelisation and to assess it more thoroughly, we propose a contextual reading and interpretation of *Ecclesia in Asia* based upon a clear distinction between the *firmness* with which he imposes compliance with the *doctrinal* principle of proclamation and the *flexibility* that he allows in the *pastoral* practice of triple dialogue. For the Pope, explicit proclamation is a non-negotiable duty and a mandate that is part and parcel of what constitutes the very identity and mission of the Church. However, in difficult situations such as those facing the Church in Asia, where, in Peter C. Phan’s view, “the question of religious pluralism is literally a matter of life and death,”<sup>471</sup> a gradual and pedagogical

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<sup>469</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Cultures, Religions, and Power: Proclaiming Christ in the United States Today,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 729; see also *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) 17-8. Robert Schreiter also laments the fact that “dialogue continues to be misunderstood in some sectors as an alternative to proclamation or to mission itself,” and insists that “the message to be emphasized over and over again is that dialogue is, in some places like Asia, simply *the way* the good news of Jesus Christ can likely be heard and understood” (emphasis added). See “Mission in the Third Millennium,” in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 158.

<sup>470</sup> S.J. Emmanuel, “Asian Mission for the Next Millennium? Chances and Challenges,” *The Way* (April 1999) 108. In a careful analysis of the synodal interventions, John Mansford Prior notes that “many bishops do not separate proclamation from dialogue; in Asia we proclaim *in* and *through* dialogue” (emphasis added). See “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 239. J. Augustine Di Noia contends that “the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* resolves the tension by its forthright submission of dialogue within or under mission. This marks an important development in the way the Church understands its participation in interreligious dialogue.” See “The Church and Dialogue with Other Religions: A Plea for the Recognition of Differences,” in *A Church for All Peoples: Missionary Issues in a World Church*, edited by Eugene LaVerdiere (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1993) 78. For Michael Amaladoss, “the goal of mission is the building up of the reign of God and of the church as its symbol and servant. In Asia this goal is achieved through a threefold dialogue of the Gospel with the poor, the cultures, and the religions.” See “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31:1 (January 2007) 24.

<sup>471</sup> Peter C. Phan, review of *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, by Paul Knitter, *Horizons* 30 (2003) 117.

approach to evangelisation is also acceptable, one that includes both witness and triple dialogue.

In our view, by insisting that Asian Christians must proclaim Jesus as the universal and only saviour, John Paul II has simply followed Christ's command and the teachings of Vatican II on Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.<sup>472</sup> By affirming that triple dialogue, especially interreligious dialogue, is integral to evangelisation, he has shown a lot of pastoral flexibility by incorporating the concerns of the Asian bishops. This approach shows that while he is firm on theological principles, regardless of whether the audience is the universal Church as in the case of *Redemptoris Missio*, or a local Church as in *Ecclesia in Asia*, he is quite prepared to be flexible by wholeheartedly accepting the mission strategy of triple dialogue as proposed by the bishops of Asia. Like the two types of proclamation discussed in *Redemptoris Missio*,<sup>473</sup> which are complementary, proclamation and triple dialogue should go hand in hand.<sup>474</sup> Explicit proclamation is obviously the same as the Encyclical's proclamation of the Christ event (the *kerygma* of the apostles), and triple dialogue, with its accent on the building up of the kingdom of God, relates to the proclamation of the kingdom of God (the content of Jesus' own *kerygma*).

John Paul II's policy of theological firmness and pastoral flexibility is probably the outcome of what he learned from the failure to write a *relatio* that could bring two opposite theological positions at the Synod on Evangelisation in 1974 into a meaningful synthesis.<sup>475</sup> This Synod ended in "a kind of ecclesiastical gridlock,"<sup>476</sup> as

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<sup>472</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 19-20; Vatican Council II, "Nostra Aetate. Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," no. 2, in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. edition (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 739.

<sup>473</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 16.

<sup>474</sup> The FABC also considers that "dialogue and proclamation are complementary." See BIRA III, art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120.

<sup>475</sup> Julian Filochowski, "Looking Out to the World's Poor: The Teachings of Paul VI," in *The New Politics: Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Paul Valley (London: SCM Press, 1998) 78.

<sup>476</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999) 221.



the final text, prepared by the then Cardinal Wojtyla, the appointed relator, and the two theologian-secretaries, was not accepted by the Synod participants.<sup>477</sup> At the time, one view was espoused by Father Domenico Grasso who represented “the older classical model of the Roman School,” and the other adopted by Father Duraisamy Simon Amalorpavadass who proposed “a new voice from the contemporary world of experience.”<sup>478</sup> This tension and the subsequent failure to deliver the final report had surely played a part in his subsequent dealings with local Churches as the supreme Pontiff, and his design of a missionary approach based on two pillars of proclamation and triple dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*. By insisting on the primacy and centrality of proclamation John Paul II has effectively returned to the Christian sources (*ressourcement*) as the duty of proclamation is based on the very commission of Christ, the *Ur*-tradition. By prescribing the triple dialogue as the fundamental task of Asian Christians, he has adapted (*aggiornamento*) the evangelising mission of the Church to the realities of contemporary Asia. So, in *Ecclesia in Asia*, one can also detect a replay of the contest at Vatican II between the so-called conservatives and progressives, only this time it is presented on a wider scale and to the wider world of Asia.

By adopting the *fortiter* and *suaviter* approach to doing Christian mission in Asia, John Paul II has shown himself to be a contextual theologian and pastor par excellence, one who is faithful to the Gospel and the Church’s tradition, and at the same time, sensitive to the religious, cultural, and social situations of Asia. This approach also demonstrates that there is no inherent contradiction in his theology of Christian mission as presented in *Ecclesia in Asia*, but a coherent synthesis and a consistency of thought that have the capacity to harmonise different emphases and different shades of meaning often developed by Asian theologians when they reflect on the mission of the Church in Asia. For the Pope, evangelisation in the Asian

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<sup>477</sup> According to Weigel, the Synod Fathers, “unable to agree on a text of their own, handed the whole business over to a post-synodal commission, which in turn handed all the material generated by the Synod to Paul VI, suggesting that he do something about it.” Ibid. The result was the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntianti*, “one of the finest documents of Paul VI’s pontificate.” Ibid. In Julian Filochowski’s assessment, “it is a document of exceptional merit, a major literary work, the fruit of mature reflection on a muddled and indecisive synod.” See “Looking Out to the World’s Poor: The Teachings of Paul VI,” in *The New Politics: Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Paul Valley (London: SCM Press, 1998) 78.

<sup>478</sup> Rembert Weakland, “Archbishop’s Welcome,” *CTSA Proceedings* 56 (2001) viii.

context necessarily includes proclamation, witness, and triple dialogue, and it is our argument that these tasks are also what the FABC prescribes for all Asian Christians, in particular lay people.<sup>479</sup> The final part of this section will explore further this symbiosis between theologies of the laity of the Pope and the Asian bishops. It also highlights some inevitable divergences in their views given that they see the Church's evangelizing mission from two different perspectives, one universal and the other local, one rooted in the Western rational thinking and the other steeped in the humus of Asian traditions.

In addition to proclamation and triple dialogue, the tasks that are incumbent on all Asian Christians, both John Paul II and the FABC emphasise witness of life as the fundamental role and mission of the Asian laity. Indeed, for John Paul II, witness of life is the cornerstone of the mission of the Asian laity. In the only section of *Ecclesia in Asia* that carries the heading "The Laity", John Paul II encourages "all lay people to assume their proper role in the life and mission of the People of God as witnesses to Christ wherever they may find themselves."<sup>480</sup> Elsewhere, in a speech to promulgate the Apostolic Exhortation in India, he emphasises that lay people are called to "bear witness" to their faith "in a world of contrasts," and to "transform society by infusing the 'mind of Christ' into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the world" in which they live.<sup>481</sup> In his presentation of the post-synodal document, Cardinal Paul Shan of Taiwan also draws attention to the notion of witness. In his words, "As we get to the end of the Apostolic Exhortation we can sense that the most fervent desire of the Holy Father is to see the Church become in the Third Millennium a community of

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<sup>479</sup> Felix Wilfred observes that, for the FABC, "proclamation is interpreted in terms of witness, dialogue and liberation, without exhausting it in these" ("Images of Jesus Christ in the Asian Pastoral Context: An Interpretation of Documents from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," *Concilium* 2 [April 1993] 55). According to the Asian bishops, "the involvement of the laity in the ministry of dialogue ... is a necessity of the Church in Asia," BIRA IV/I, art. 17, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 250. Oswald Gracias provides an inspiring clarification of the intimate connection between proclamation, witness, and dialogue as follows: "for those who are authentically living the Gospel, every dialogue becomes proclamation because every contact with the other is a witness, animating the temporal sphere with Gospel values or even proclaiming the name of Jesus our Master." See "Mission in Asia Today – Relations with Other Religions Existing in Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 71 (February 2007) 91.

<sup>480</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 45.

<sup>481</sup> John Paul II, "Finding the Light," in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian publications, 2002) 61; *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 22.

faithful witnesses, a more genuine and transparent witnessing Church.”<sup>482</sup> The Asian bishops, like John Paul II, place an enormous importance on the Christian witness of life. At their Seventh Plenary Assembly in 2000, held only two months after the promulgation of *Ecclesia in Asia*, they affirmed that “the most effective means of evangelization and service in the name of Christ has always been and continues to be the witness of life.”<sup>483</sup> They went on to insist that “this witness has to become the way of the Gospel for persons, institutions and the whole Church community.”<sup>484</sup>

Where John Paul II and the FABC may seem to diverge is in regard to the identity of lay people. In *Christifideles Laici*, the Pope seems to provide a definition of the laity based on three pillars of baptism, secularity, and participation of lay people as sharers of the triple mission of Christ.<sup>485</sup> In *Ecclesia in Asia*, he speaks of lay people mainly as missionaries and witnesses to the Gospel. Unlike John Paul II, the FABC describes the laity as Asian Christians,<sup>486</sup> a generic term that emphasises the dual calling of faith and cultural belonging, and one that lies at the heart of what it means to be a Christian in Asia. It encompasses laity, religious, and the clergy who, while not ceasing to be Asian Christians, have the specific role of serving and leading the laity in the project of establishing the Kingdom of God.<sup>487</sup> It is at their Fourth Plenary Assembly held to reflect on the vocation and mission of the laity that the bishops of Asia discuss the triple mission of the clergy, that is, with reference to the laity.<sup>488</sup> John Paul II, on the contrary, tends to put more emphasis on the different roles and responsibilities of the pastors, the religious, and the laity in the one mission of the Church.<sup>489</sup> His differentiation between the clergy and the laity is anchored in the

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<sup>482</sup> Paul Cardinal Shan, “Presentation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* of His Holiness John Paul II on Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: ‘That They May Have Life and Have It Abundantly’ (Jn. 10:10),” *Japan Mission Journal* 53 (1999) 263-76 at 275.

<sup>483</sup> FABC VII, art. Part III.C.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 12.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-3.

<sup>485</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9.

<sup>486</sup> FABC IV, arts. 4.1.3, 4.4.2-4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191, 192-3.

<sup>487</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4.4., *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>488</sup> FABC IV, art. 4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192-3.

<sup>489</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 43, 44, and 45 respectively.

concept of secularity or presence to the world, which, in his view, is a distinctive character of lay people.<sup>490</sup> It is also noteworthy that in *Christifideles Laici* Christian holiness is defined as the perfection of charity, but in *Ecclesia in Asia* it seems to be associated with genuine witness of life, a view that is closer to the thinking of the bishops of Asia.

Our discussion in this section shows that the theologies of the laity of John Paul II and the FABC are both based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. However, the problems facing the Pope and the Asian bishops in the intervening years differed from the issues confronting the Council half a century ago. Hence, each of these theologies is by no means a mere repetition of the Council's doctrinal principles and pastoral guidelines. Rather, each explores a number of themes, which were developed in response to the issues and problems of the day, one from a universal view and the other with a more contextual concern. The development of these contextual theologies displays some variance in response to different needs and challenges, hence spawning different theological interpretations. However, with respect to, and within the ambit of, the question of the laity, there is a substantial convergence in the thinking of John Paul II and the Asian bishops.

## 8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated John Paul II's theology of the laity in *Christifideles Laici* and *Ecclesia in Asia* with reference to the documents of the Catholic bishops of Asia. In *Christifideles Laici* the Pope employs the concept of communion, and the biblical image of Jesus Christ as the true vine and his disciples as branches in the vine to explain the sacramental dignity, identity, participation, and co-responsibility of lay people in the Church. This communion means first of all Christians' union of love

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<sup>490</sup> In *Ecclesia in Asia* (no. 44), John Paul II categorically declared that "secularity is the true and distinctive mark of the layperson and of lay spirituality, which means that the laity strive to evangelize the various sectors of family, social, professional, cultural and political life." Earlier he seemed to teach that the fullness of ministry lies with the ordained stating that "the services and ministries performed by the lay faithful are never properly speaking, pastoral, not even when they supply for certain actions and certain concerns of the shepherd." See "Do Laity Share in the Priest's Pastoral Ministry?" *Origins* 24:3 (2 June 1994) 42. The Pope went on to affirm that "only with constant reference to the one source, the 'ministry of Christ'...may the term *ministry* be applied to a certain extent and without ambiguity to the lay faithful." Ibid.

with God brought about by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This union in turn has as its vital aspect the missionary communion which all lay faithful are called to exercise and live out in the world. The predominantly Trinitarian and ecclesiological approach of *Christifideles Laici* is in marked contrast to that adopted by *Ecclesia in Asia* where the Pope proceeds from a Christological and pneumatological perspective to clarify the role of lay people as witnesses to the Gospel who share in the evangelising mission of the Church, understood as proclamation, inculturation, communion, solidarity, and dialogue. At the foundation of the theology of the laity presented in *Christifideles Laici* is the baptismal dignity of all the faithful, which is intimately connected to his conception of the Church as a mystery of communion, a necessary context for understanding the identity, vocation, and mission of lay people. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, he expands his understanding of the vocation and mission of Asian Christians by applying the logic of faith as gift and evangelisation as task with an emphasis on the role of lay people as witnesses to the Gospel in the Church, understood as a witnessing community of faith that is built on two pillars of communion and mission.

In the works considered, John Paul II and the bishops of Asia have followed a contextual approach in their probing into the question of the laity. Both draw their inspiration from the same theological sources, especially the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, but each addresses a different audience and confronts a different set of issues, one of a more universal character and the other of a predominantly localised context. While in *Christifideles Laici* and *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope seems to maintain a distinction between the laity and the clergy by an accent on the secularity of lay people, the FABC prefers to opt for an encompassing description of the laity as Asian Christians, hence able to develop a single theology of mission for all the baptised, laity and clergy included. However, their main findings on the issue of the laity are remarkably similar, and their thoughts on the role of the laity converge. Indeed, for both of them, the evangelising mission of the Church, a supreme duty that is incumbent on all Asian Christians, includes the proclamation of the Gospel, the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia, and the imperative of witness of life, a special calling of lay people. In *Christifideles Laici* lay people are called to Christian holiness, articulated as the perfection of charity. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, holiness of life is associated with the Christian witness of life, a

concept that is integral to the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and a view that is also adopted by the Asian bishops.

This chapter proposes a new approach to interpreting John Paul II's theology of evangelisation, one that is based on a basic distinction between the doctrinal firmness (*fortiter*) with which he imposes compliance with the imperative of proclamation and the pastoral flexibility (*suaviter*) that he encourages in the exercise of the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. This approach underscores the logic, coherence, and consistency of thought in John Paul II's theology of mission, and offers a modest way to harmonise the different viewpoints on the relationship between evangelisation, proclamation, and interreligious dialogue. It also serves as a reminder that the constructions of theology should never be divorced from both the Gospel and the local context.

In short, the statements of John Paul II and the FABC on the vocation and mission of the laity are the outstanding means by which the teachings of Vatican II are assimilated and implemented in the universal Church and in the local Churches in Asia. To gain deeper insights into the contextual interpretation and application of the Council teachings, it would be necessary to advance the investigation of the role of lay people further in the context of a local Church in a particular country. And this is the journey that we intend to take in the next chapter by conducting a theological study into the vocation and mission of lay people in the Catholic Church in Vietnam.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE PASTORAL LETTERS OF THE VIETNAMESE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE WITH REFERENCE TO THE TEACHINGS OF JOHN PAUL II AND THE FABC

#### 9.1 Introduction

Remembering Sören Kierkegaard's famous observation that we live our lives looking forward but understand them looking backward,<sup>1</sup> we can hardly find a better way to appreciate the theology of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (VEC) than to review its pastoral letters issued over the past two decades.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, on 24 April 1980, nearly five years after a North Vietnamese tank crashed through the iron gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon,<sup>3</sup> the seat of the former South Vietnamese Government,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Casey, "Kierkegaard The Celibate," *The Way* 45:4 (October 2006) 104.

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral letters and communiqués in Vietnamese language of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (hereafter abbreviated to VEC), issued between 1951 and 2000, were published in two collections edited by Trần Anh Dũng, *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Viet Nam (1960-1995)] (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 1996), and *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)* [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (1980-2000)] (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 2001). Some of these documents were also published in the 2004 and 2005 Almanacs of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, edited by the VEC's General Secretariat. A complete list of the VEC's pastoral letters, and those released after 2001, is available online at <http://www.gpnt.net/diendan/showthread.php?t=708>; <http://www.lavang.co.uk/TTMVLondon/GiaoHoiVietnam/ng-HDGM.htm>; <http://www.catholic.org.tw/vntaiwan/ghvietnam/thumucvu.htm>. Several of the VEC's pastoral letters and communiqués, especially those issued over the past twenty years, were translated either into English by the Union of Catholic Asia News (UCAN), available online at <http://www.ucanews.com>, with some being published in the *Catholic International*, or into French by *Eglises d'Asie*, a monthly magazine published by the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris. Others were professionally rendered into French by *Eglises d'Asie*, accessible from <http://eglasie.mepasie.org>. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of other documents from Vietnamese and French are mine throughout. Footnotes are usually made to the original texts in Vietnamese or in French in preference to the English translations some of which leave a lot to be desired. Henceforth, a cited pastoral letter will be abbreviated to "VEC's Pastoral Letter" followed by the year of publication and page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> This widely reported event, which marked "the end of the tragedy," occurred just before 11am on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1975. See Roberto R. Romulo [former Philippine foreign secretary], "After the Fall," *AsiaWeek* (14 April 2000) 33; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 669, 687; Thomas C. Fox, "Vietnam After 25 Years: Life and Hope, But War Scars Linger On," *National Catholic Reporter* (28 April 2000) 15; Henry A. Kissinger, "The Long Shadows of Vietnam," *The BulletinNewsweek* (2 May 2000) 85. From 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1976, Saigon and its adjoining city Chợ Lớn was renamed Hồ Chí Minh City (1894-1969), after the man who founded the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930. See Nguyễn Như Ý, Nguyễn Thành Chương and Bùi Thiết, *Tự Điển Địa Danh Văn Hóa và Thắng Cảnh Việt Nam: Dictionary of Vietnamese Cultural Place Names and Scenic Spots* ([Hà Nội]: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, [2004]), s.v. "Sài Gòn," "Chợ Lớn," 895, 226; Wynn Wilcox, "Allegories of the U.S.-Vietnam War: Nguyễn Ánh, Nguyễn Huệ, and the 'Unification Debates',"

the Catholic bishops of both North and South Vietnam were permitted to hold their first joint plenary meeting in Hanoi, the capital of a unified Vietnam under the Communist control.<sup>4</sup> For Vietnamese Catholics this date marked the end of the division of their Church into two ecclesial communities that had begun concomitantly with the political partition of the country into two states, the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the non-Communist State of Vietnam in the South,<sup>5</sup> and signalled the beginning of a new period of reflection and engagement, one that endeavoured to interpret the new signs of the times in light of the Gospel. At the conclusion of this historic gathering on 1 May 1980 the bishops published the statutes of the VEC,<sup>6</sup> and promulgated their first pastoral letter to the people of God in the whole country.<sup>7</sup> This letter expresses the common destiny that the Church

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*Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17:1 (2003) 130; see also Daniel Hémery, *Ho Chi Minh: De L'Indochine au Vietnam*, ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1990) 67-8, 83, 125, 130.

<sup>4</sup> Thirty-three out of forty bishops attended this first gathering which was held from 24<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May 1980. See Jean Maïs, “Première réunion de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam et préparation de la lettre commune,” *Flashes sur le Vietnam* (October 1980) 1-2. The Vietnamese Catholic hierarchy was established by Pope John XXIII in 1960, charged with pastoral responsibilities for three ecclesiastical provinces of Hanoi, Hue, and Saigon in the country, which at that time comprised three archdioceses and 17 dioceses. See Pope John XXIII, “Sắc Chi *Venerabilium Nostrorum* Thiết Lập Hàng Giáo Phẩm Việt Nam [Apostolic Constitution *Venerabilium Nostrorum* on the Establishment of the Vietnamese Hierarchy],” in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Viet Nam (1960-1995)], edited by Trần Anh Dũng (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 1996) 139-44. By 1975 the total number of dioceses, including the three existing archdioceses, increased to 25, [and in 2006 to 26]. See Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference], *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], edited by Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký, Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [General Secretariat, The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference] (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005) 200, 511. Hereafter only the title of the Almanac 2005 will be cited.

<sup>5</sup> On 21<sup>st</sup> July 1954, following the French defeat on 6<sup>th</sup> May at Điện Biên Phủ, a district town in the north-western region of Vietnam, a peace treaty, officially referred to as the Geneva Accords, was signed by representatives of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and France at the Geneva Conference, calling for the withdrawal of the French, and a temporary division of the country, at the Bến Hải river, on the seventeenth parallel, into two separate administrative zones until the holding of unification elections. Subsequent political events turned these zones into two separate states. See Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 8, 41, 104, 141, 143-4; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Volume 12, Micropaedia*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, s.v. “Vietnam War (1955-75),” 361.

<sup>6</sup> VEC, “Quy Chế Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam 1980” [Statutes of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 1980], in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Viet Nam (1960-1995)], edited by Trần Anh Dũng (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 1996) 266-74. Henceforth only the title of the book will be quoted.

<sup>7</sup> Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference], “Thư chung 1980 của Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam” [Common Letter of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 1980], no. 7, in *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 240-7. Henceforth, the 1980 common or pastoral letter will be abbreviated to “VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980” followed by section numbers. While this pastoral letter was published in the government-



shares with the entire nation. It demands new ways of thinking and acting, and is a watershed in the history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam—on at least two counts. First, from 1954 to 1979, South Vietnamese bishops addressed their pastoral letters only to the faithful in the South,<sup>8</sup> while this ecclesial instrument was not available to their counterparts in the North.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, this letter proposes a pastoral vision of the VEC for a unified Church that had to live and operate under the watchful eye of a new Government.<sup>10</sup> This new vision was carefully articulated by the VEC who was acutely aware of the enormous implications of its message for the Church in Vietnam. It remained virtually unchanged over the next twenty years. But in 2001 the bishops recognised the need to give a fresh pastoral direction in response to new challenges confronting the Church at the dawn of the third millennium.<sup>11</sup> During the preceding

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sanctioned weekly *Công Giáo và Dân Tộc* (Catholicism and Nation) based in Saigon on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1980, and quickly circulated in South Vietnam, it took more time for it to be communicated to the faithful in the North. See Jean Maïs, “Première réunion de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam et preparation de la lettre commune,” *Flashes sur le Vietnam* (October 1980) 3.

<sup>8</sup> Some of the pastoral letters and communications issued by the bishops of South Vietnam were actually promulgated in the name of the entire Vietnamese Episcopal Conference, for instance, those published in 1966, 1968, 1971, and 1974. See respectively *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 185, 191, 211, and 241. In a 1974 declaration, South Vietnamese bishops made a formal appeal to the Communist Government of North Vietnam to give religious freedom to all religions, and, to allow, *inter alia*, the bishops in the North to meet regularly to discuss ecclesial matters, to have contacts with the bishops in the South, and especially to be able to communicate with the Holy See in Rome. *Ibid.*, 238-9.

<sup>9</sup> Between 1954 and 1975, the bishops in North Vietnam did not issue any joint pastoral letter, and at least three out of ten dioceses in the North were without a bishop. Two bishops appointed by the Vatican were not permitted to receive consecration. For example, Father Peter Phạm Tân of Thanh Hoá diocese was appointed on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1959, but ordained only on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1975, and Father Vincent Paul Phạm Văn Dụ of Lạng Sơn, a diocese that had only three priests left after the massive exodus of Catholics, both laity and clergy, from the North to the South in 1954, appointed on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1960 and consecrated on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1979. By 1990 there was only one priest left in this diocese, which borders the Guangxi province of China. The diocese of Bắc Ninh was without a resident bishop between 1956 and 1963. In 1990, it had two bishops but only two functioning priests for a population of 90,000 Catholics. See Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference], *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 586, 606, and 563 respectively. See also *Eglises d'Asie*, “Fidélité et espérance: Une interview de Mgr Nguyễn Minh Nhật, président de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam,” *Eglises d'Asie* 101 (16 December 1990), <http://www.eblasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Missi, “Une Eglise sous haute surveillance: Les difficiles rapports entre l’Etat communiste et les catholiques,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 16-9.

<sup>11</sup> Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference], “Thư chung năm 2001 của Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam gửi cộng đồng dân Chúa” [Common Letter of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 2001 to the Community of the People of God], in *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 248-55. Hereafter, this common or pastoral letter will be referred to as “VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001” followed by section numbers.

period, there had been some modifications, mainly in emphasis. For instance, in 1992 it had become necessary to address issues associated with Vietnam's entry into the market economy,<sup>12</sup> in 1998 on the occasion of the Synod for Asia, and in 2000 when the Church commemorated the last Holy Year of the second millennium.

The outstanding feature of the 1980 pastoral letter was the bishops' decision to define the evangelising mission of the Church in Vietnam as "Sống Phúc Âm giữa lòng dân tộc để phục vụ hạnh phúc của đồng bào" ["Living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of our compatriots"].<sup>13</sup> We would argue that this condensed definition, often substantially reiterated in subsequent letters,<sup>14</sup> came to summarise the vocation and mission of Vietnamese lay people. Consequently, it is a key expression of the theology of the laity according the Catholic bishops of Vietnam. It signalled a change in their thinking on the role of lay people in the new society, and is testimony of the search for a contextual expression of the mission of

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<sup>12</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 2. Problems cited by Vietnamese Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt in his year-end report to the National Assembly on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1992 included, among other things, high unemployment, low productivity, smuggling, and corruption. See Dorothy R. Avery, "Vietnam in 1992: Win Some; Lose Some," *Asian Survey* 33:1 (January 1993) 67. The amendments of the 1980 Constitution, approved in the April 1992 session of the National Assembly, institutionalised the renovation (*đổi mới*) program initiated by the Sixth Party Congress held in December 1986. See Peter N.V. Hai, "Recent Public Service Reform in Vietnam," in *Infrastructural Development and Legal Change in Vietnam*, edited by Graham Hassall and Truong Truong (Melbourne: Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies, The University of Melbourne, 1994) 129; Ronald J. Cima, "Vietnam in 1988: The Brink of renewal," *Asian Survey* 29:1 (January 1989) 64, and Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 413. As in China, *đổi mới* (renewal) in Vietnam meant "moving towards a free-market economy while maintaining the party's absolute monopoly on political power." See The Economist, "Manh Alive," *The Economist* (29 April 2006) 34 [As the party's general secretary Nong Duc Manh was the most senior leader in the country]; see also Melanie Beresford, "Doi Moi in Review: The Challenges of Building Market Socialism in Vietnam," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38:2 (May 2008) 221. The Chinese joke about "signal left but turn right" also applies to Vietnam to a large extent. The Vietnamese term "*đổi mới*" (renovation or renewal) comprises literally two words: "to change" and "new."

<sup>13</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 14. This English translation is my own. Fr Jean Maïs of the Missions Étrangères de Paris translated this pastoral letter from Vietnamese into French and rendered the catch-phrase as "vivre l'évangile au sein du peuple au service du bonheur de nos compatriotes." See "Lettre commune de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam à l'ensemble des prêtres, religieux et laïcs de tout le pays," *Flashes sur le Vietnam* (October 1980); see also *Eglises d'Asie*, "Après vingt années d'attente: Une interview de Mgr Paul Nguyen Van Binh [Archbishop of Saigon]," *Eglises d'Asie* 199 (16 May 1995), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006).

<sup>14</sup> For example, the French version of the 1991 Pastoral Letter reiterates the pastoral orientation enunciated in the 1980 letter in the following words: "Vivre et annoncer l'Évangile au sein du peuple vietnamien au service du bonheur de nos compatriotes." VEC, "Lettre commune de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam envoyée à la communauté du peuple de Dieu pour l'année 2001," *Eglises d'Asie* 338 (1 October 2001) 23.

the Church, which had to deal with a crisis of being Church in a Communist-governed country. Though adopted at the historic gathering in 1980, there were historical antecedents. In fact, a localised quest to find a *modus vivendi* with the Communist regime had already begun in 1954 in the dioceses in North Vietnam, where Church activities were closely regulated and severely curtailed over the next two decades.<sup>15</sup> This attempt was intensified after April 1975 in concert with the ecclesial community in the South, which had previously been accustomed to a good deal of religious freedom, and now manifested a spirit of courageous adaptation after an initial experience of the shock of restriction on religious liberty.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, in addition to a careful study of the pastoral letters of the VEC issued between 1980 and 2001,<sup>17</sup> this

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<sup>15</sup> While no bishops from North Vietnam were allowed to attend the Second Vatican Council, sixteen bishops from the South, eleven Vietnamese and five expatriates, participated in conciliar sessions. See Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Lược Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980) [and] Hội Đồng Giám mục Việt Nam (1980-2000) [Brief History of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1533-1980) [and] The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 1980-2000], in *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)*, edited by Trần Anh Dũng (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 2001) 28. Hereafter, only the title of this document will be cited, followed by relevant page numbers. Bishop Trịnh Văn Căn, Coadjutor of Hanoi, was the first prelate from North Vietnam permitted by the government to travel to Rome to participate in the 1974 Synod of Bishops. Ibid., 30-1. In a public letter issued in 1974 calling for cessation of hostilities and construction of genuine peace, the bishops of South Vietnam made a formal appeal to the Communist Government in the North to give democratic liberties including religious freedom to all religions. See “Tuyên Ngôn Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1974)” [Manifesto of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (1974)], in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 238-9. For the Catholic Church, they asked the North Vietnamese Government to allow lay people, in particular young people, to freely practice their belief, priests and religious to exercise their pastoral duties, all seminaries to re-open, and bishops to regularly meet to discuss ecclesial matters, to establish contact with the bishops in the South, and especially with the Holy See in Rome. Ibid. It is of note that prior to Vatican II, the Catholic Church in North Vietnam adopted a firm and non-cooperative position with the Communist regime and most Catholic families did not send their children to government schools. See Gioan B. Phạm Minh Mẫn [Cardinal, Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City], “Giáo đức và Giáo dục” [Education of Virtues and Scholastic Education], <http://www.vietcatholic.net/News/Html/45841.htm> (accessed 24 July 2007).

<sup>16</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the unsettling period before and after 30<sup>th</sup> April 1975, the date of the Communist takeover of South Vietnam, eleven new bishops were consecrated, often in secrecy, by the special powers granted to Vietnamese bishops. See Eglises d’Asie, “1995, une année riche en anniversaire pour le Vietnam et l’Eglise catholique,” *Eglises d’Asie* 204 (1 August 1995), <http://www.eglasiemepasie.org> (accessed 8 December 2006); see also Wilfried Lulei, “Wiedervereinigung: Wunsch und Wirklichkeit,” *Internationales Asienforum* 23:3-4 (1992) 331. The correct date of this momentous event in the history of Vietnam is 30<sup>th</sup> April 1975 rather than 30<sup>th</sup> May 1975 as stated by Ha Van Minh in the opening paragraph to the first chapter of his doctoral thesis that deals with the situation of the Vietnamese laity after 1975. Thus he writes, “Nach dem vollständigen militärischen Zusammenbruch Südvietnams am 30. Mai [sic] 1975 und dem Sieg der Kommunisten war Vietnam vereinigt, und zwar nach einer 21jährigen Trennung in einen Nord- und einen Südstaat (1954-1975)....” See *Die Laien in der Kirche Vietnams: Eine pastoraltheologische Studie zu ihrer Rolle in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001) 98.

<sup>17</sup> This time frame is chosen to facilitate a comparative assessment of the theologies of the laity according to the VEC and the FABC as our examination of the statements of the latter is limited to those issued between 1970 and 2001. It also covers a substantial and intellectually fecund period of John Paul II’s pontificate, which began in 1978 and ended in April 2005.

chapter analyses previous pastoral letters such as those published between 1951 and 1953 in the name of the Episcopal Conference of Indochina. At that time, this conference included the three regions of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.<sup>18</sup> We also examine the pastoral letters produced by the bishops of South Vietnam from 1954 to 1979, and those that have jointly been published from 2002 by the bishops of both North and South Vietnam.

The first part of the chapter provides a rapid survey of the history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam reviewing some of the key events, both ecclesial and secular, since the beginning of Christianity in this country, and fixing particular attention on the role of lay people. It will serve as a historical backdrop to our examination, in the second part, of the theology of the laity proposed in the 1980 pastoral letter. This theology, we argue, is essentially Christocentric and dialogical. It draws on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and both Paul VI and John Paul II, and emphasises *inter alia* the primacy of the human person, the centrality of the ideas of service and solidarity, the double mission of the Church in regard to the world—that is,

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<sup>18</sup> Between 1859 and 1884 France took control of all of Vietnam and divided the country into three separate political entities: Tonkin (North Vietnam) and Annam (Central Vietnam) as protectorates, and Cochinchina (South Vietnam) as a French colony. In 1887, together with Cambodia and Laos, they constituted the French Indochinese Union. See Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 7-8, 24; Neil Jamieson, “Vietnamese,” in *Cultures of the World: Selections from the Ten-Volume Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, edited by Melvin Ember and Carol R. Ember (New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA, 1999) 327-8; *Whitaker’s Almanack 2006*, 138<sup>th</sup> edition, s.v. “Vietnam.” For further details of the *Traité de Protectorat* of 6<sup>th</sup> June 1884, also known as the 1884 Patenôtre Treaty, that placed Tonkin and Annam under the French rule, see Bảo Đại [the last king of Vietnam (1913-1997) who reigned from 1925 to 1945], *Con Rồng Việt Nam: Hồi Ký Chính Trị 1913-1987* [*The Vietnamese Dragon: Political Memoirs 1913-1987*] (Los Alamitos, Calif.: Nguyễn Phước Tộc, 1990) 593-6; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 539-41. Citing Do Quang Chinh, Peter C. Phan notes that “both Tonkin and Cochinchina of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are not identical with those of the nineteenth century. Under French domination, Vietnam was divided into three parts by the June 6, 1884, Franco-Vietnamese treaty: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchine. In the seventeenth century, Cochinchina was part of Annam and stretched from the Gianh river to Phan Thiet, whereas the Cochinchine of the French occupation extended from Phan Thiet to Ha Tien.” See footnote no. 5 in Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998) 7; see also Do Quang Chinh, “La mission au Viet-Nam 1624-30 et 1640-45 d’Alexandre de Rhodes, S.J. avignonnais,” (Diss., Sorbonne, 1969) 42-3; Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1998) 16. For Tana, the Nguyễn’s southern conquests came in three stages: “the first brought them from Cù Mông to Phan Phiết,” and the second and third stages saw Nguyễn authority spread to Gia Định and modern Hà Tiên. Ibid. Phan also notes that “the name ‘Cochinchina’ seems to have derived from the old name of the country ‘Giao chi’ .... To avoid confusion with Cochin in India, they [the Portuguese merchants] added the word ‘Cina’ at the end to indicate nearness to China.” Phan, *ibid.* See also page 1 of chapter 1 of Christoforo Borri’s *Cochin-China: London 1633* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1970).

the proclamation of the Gospel and the contribution to the good of all people, and finally, the imperative of witness and holiness of life. As a response to the challenges of *Gaudium et Spes* in the context of Vietnam, the VEC's theology reflects a dialectical relationship between the Church and the society of Vietnam, one that is based on the primacy and centrality of the human person. The third part of the chapter traces the development of the Vietnamese bishops' contextual theology of the laity over the second half of the twentieth century, and the first few years of the third millennium, with a focus on the period between 1980 and 2001, and within the ecclesiological framework of the Church as the people of God.<sup>19</sup> There is, underlying the development of this theology over these turbulent years of Vietnamese history, a coherent vision. It centres on the idea of service, a motif that is either coupled with the concepts of solidarity and witness of life as in the 1980 pastoral letter, or reinforced by the notions of love, service, and dialogue as in the 2001 pastoral letter. Still, along with a concentration on the nature and mission of the Church, the richest legacy of these two pastoral letters is to be found in their focus on Jesus Christ himself. This section concludes with a comparative assessment of the VEC's theology of the laity and those of John Paul II and the FABC. It suggests that with the advent of the Asian Synod, the promulgation of *Ecclesia in Asia*, and especially, the increased participation of the Vietnamese bishops in the meetings of the FABC, the VEC's theology of the laity has become more closely aligned with the thinking of both John Paul II and the Asian bishops. As a theological project at a local level, this theology provides a vignette of some of the VEC's endeavours to apply the papal teachings of Paul VI and John Paul II, and the FABC's vision of triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor. However, in the particular context of Vietnam this theology has given rise to a new type of dialogue, namely, dialogue with the national Government. This is an area that has not received sufficient attention in the deliberations of the Asian bishops. Given the high degree of political and social controls exerted by many current regimes in Asia, the pioneering work of the VEC in the field of dialogical engagement with the national Government could serve as a model for other local Churches in Asia. Hence, there is a strong case for the bishops of Asia to incorporate this dialogical dimension into their theological expression of triple dialogue.

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<sup>19</sup> See the headings of nos. 6 and 8 in the VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980.

## 9.2 Historical Overview

Recording a 1663 edict which prohibited the propagation of Christianity, Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục,<sup>20</sup> the Imperial Annals of Vietnam, notes that, according to private sources, in March 1533 a certain Western man under the name of “I-nê-khu” (Ignatius) secretly preached the religion of Christ in Nam Định, a province in North Vietnam today.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, while its exactitude may be disputed, this date has generally been accepted by Vietnamese scholars to be the beginning of Christianity in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục (Texts and explanations of the complete mirror of the history of Vietnam, established on imperial order) were prepared between 1856 and 1884 by the order of King Tự Đức. See Lê Thành Khôi, *Le Việt-Nam: Histoire et Civilisation* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955) 66, 510; Phạm Cao Dương, *Lịch Sử Dân Tộc Việt Nam: Quyển 1: Thời Kỳ Lập Quốc* [History of the Vietnamese Nation: Volume 1: Period of Establishment], ([Huntington Beach, Calif.]: Truyền Thống Việt, 1987) 197-228.

<sup>21</sup> See Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục, vol. 33 ([Hà Nội]: Viện Sử Học, 1998) 301; cited by Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003) [Brief History of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1533-2003)],” in *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 187, and Ngô Thị Nhật and the Editorial Staff, “Niên Biểu Công Giáo Việt Nam [Chronology of Vietnamese Catholicism],” *ibid.*, 204; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 341-2; Missi, “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 13. No one knows the true identity of this European missionary as “I-nê-khu” (Ignatius) was a Vietnamese name, written in Chinese. See Trần Minh Tiết, *Histoire des persécutions au Vietnam* (Paris: [N.-D de la Trinité, Blois], 1955) 31. Taking issue with Nguyen Huu Trong’s assertion that this missionary was a religious coming from Malacca or the Sunda island in 1543, Manuel Teixeira suggested that the first religious who stationed in Malacca were the Jesuits in 1548, and they arrived in Sunda much later [My loose translation of the Portuguese text: “... os primeiros religiosos que se estabeleceram em Malaca foram os Jesuitas em 1548 e a Sunda só chegaram muito mais tarde.”]. See Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e a sua Diocese*, vol. 14, *As Missões Portuguesas no Vietnam* (Macau: Imprensa, 1977) 7; Nguyen Huu Trong, *Le Clergé National dans la Fondation de l’Église au Vietnam: Les Origines du Clergé Vietnamien* (Saigon: Tinh Việt, 1959) 61. However, for Peter C. Phan, “I Ne Khu was probably a Christian (priest?) who was sailing from Malacca to Macao along the coast of Vietnam and decided to enter the country to preach the Gospel” (*Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998] 8). It is of note that “according to Chinese records the first contact between Vietnamese and Europeans was in AD 166 when travellers from the Rome of Aurelius arrived in the Red River delta near present day Haiphong.” See Pham Minh Hac, “The Education System in Vietnam,” in *Higher Education in Vietnam: Change and Response*, edited by David Sloper and Le Thac Can (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian, 1995) 46.

<sup>22</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003) [Brief History of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1533-2003)],” in *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 188; see also Joseph Nguyen Huy Lai, *La tradition religieuse spirituelle et sociale au Vietnam: Sa confrontation avec le christianisme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981) 368.

The latest almanac of the VEC, published in 2005, divides the entire history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, from 1533 to 2003, into five periods, namely, i. the Beginnings of the Church (1533-1659); ii. Early Organisation of the Church (1659-1802); iii. Trials and Tribulations (1802-1885); iv. the Development of the Church (1885-1960); v. the Maturing of the Church (1960-present).<sup>23</sup> The start date of each of these periods was marked by events that brought about significant changes to the life and structure of the Church.<sup>24</sup> While basing our rapid survey here on this schematisation, and for the seventeenth century, on Peter C. Phan's classic work *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*,<sup>25</sup> we will draw on other sources to include features that are pertinent to our investigation.<sup>26</sup> We will also qualify each of these periods with general remarks on the mission of the laity, and explicate in more details their role in the early phases of Christianity in Vietnam. Our general observation is that, throughout the entire history of the Church in this country, lay people have distinguished themselves by a fidelity to the faith, at times to the point of martyrdom, and an obedience to the hierarchy, and for the first three hundred years, were empowered to carry on their own mission of evangelisation. Writing to the bishops of Vietnam in 1966, Pope Paul VI noted the following qualities among the lay faithful in Vietnam: their exemplary adherence to the faith of their ancestors, their devotion and obedience to the hierarchy, their unconditional and unlimited trust in the divine assistance, and their generous participation in all activities of the social apostolate.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003)," 188.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998). There is no doubt that with the publication of this *magnum opus* Phan's place in the history of Vietnamese theology and the Church in Vietnam was assured. Henceforth this magisterial work will be cited by its short title *Mission and Catechesis*, followed by relevant page numbers.

<sup>26</sup> For an annotated biography on the contextual theology in Vietnam from 1800 to 2000, and prior to 1800, see respectively, *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, vol. 1, *Asia Region 7<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries; South Asia; Austral Asia*, edited by John C. England et al. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 556-655, and *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, vol. 2, *Southeast Asia*, edited by John C. England et al. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003) 48-50.

<sup>27</sup> Paul VI, "Lettre du pape Paul VI aux évêques du Vietnam [15 September 1966]," [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/letters/1966/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_let\\_19660930\\_vescovi-vietnam\\_fr.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/letters/1966/documents/hf_p-vi_let_19660930_vescovi-vietnam_fr.html) (accessed 22 June 2007).



These traits are very much in evidence as the Church in Vietnam enters into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But first, we will briefly look back at its long and dense history.

### 9.2.1 The Beginnings of the Church (1533-1659)

In 1550 a Dominican missionary by the name of Gaspar de Santa Cruz arrived in the southernmost province of Hà Tiên, which at that time belonged to Cambodia.<sup>28</sup> While concurring with the general view that “Christianity seems to have made its first appearance in Vietnam in the first decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century,” Peter C. Phan suggested that “Christian mission in Vietnam by the end of the sixteenth-century was insignificant,” and that “Christianity only began to take roots with the arrival of the Jesuits in Cochinchina (i.e. the southern part of the country, then known as Annam) in 1615.<sup>29</sup> Eleven years later, in 1626, two other members of the Society of Jesus arrived in Tonkin, the northern part of Annam.<sup>30</sup> Most of these early Jesuit missionaries worked under the authority of the Portuguese *padroado*, the majority of them being

<sup>28</sup> Peter C. Phan notes that “there is no historical evidence that Gaspar de Santa Cruz carried out missionary activities in Vietnam.” See *Mission and Catechesis*, 9; see also Ngô Thị Nhật and the Editorial Staff, “Niên Biểu Công Giáo Việt Nam [Chronology of Vietnamese Catholicism],” in *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 204; Georges Naidenoff, “Les Chrétiens du Vietnam,” *Missi Synthèse* 2 (April 1993) 4. For a helpful summary of the context of Christian mission in seventeenth-century Vietnam see Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 3-36; see also Joseph Nguyen Huy Lai, *La tradition religieuse spirituelle et sociale au Vietnam: Sa confrontation avec le christianisme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981) 365-460.

<sup>29</sup> Peter C. Phan, “Religious Plurality in East Asia Before 1800: The Encounter between Christianity and Asian Religions,” <http://www.dunglac.net/phandinhcho/plurality.htm> (accessed 4 January 2006) 20. Charles B. Maybon notes that for nearly 200 years after 1615, there were approximately 180 Jesuit missionaries in Cochinchina and Tonkin. See *Histoire Moderne du Pays d’Annam (1592-1820)* (Paris: Plon, 1920) 29. It is noteworthy that in the course of its history Vietnam was known under twelve different names, some chosen by Vietnamese rulers and others imposed by the Chinese. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 6, footnote no. 2. Annam, meaning literally “pacified South,” is a term imposed by the Chinese and offensive to the Vietnamese.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. According to Peter C. Phan, at the beginning of the seventeenth century Vietnam was under a nominal king and divided into two regions: the northern region under the Trịnh lords, referred by foreigners as Tonkin comprising Tonkin (meaning literally “Eastern Capital,” the original name of the capital of the country, which was later changed to Thang Long and then Hà Nội), Thanh Hoa, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh and the northern part of Quang Binh. The southern region under the Nguyễn lords, known in the West as Cochinchina, consists of the southern part of Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thừa Thiên, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, and Phu Yen. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 6-7; see also Alexandre De Rhodes, *Histoire du Royaume du Tonkin*, Introduction et Notes par Jean-Pierre Duteuil (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1999) 21. The seven wars between the Trịnh and the Nguyễn lasted from 1627 to 1672 brought poverty and untold sufferings to local people. See Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 295, 304.



Portuguese with the rest being Italian or Japanese.<sup>31</sup> The most famous among them was Alexandre de Rhodes who arrived in Cửa Bạng (Thanh Hoá), on the feast of Saint Joseph of 19 March 1627,<sup>32</sup> inaugurating the first formal programme of evangelisation in Tonkin. After being expelled from Vietnam in 1645 he returned to Macao, and later in 1649 went to Rome to plead for the establishment of the local hierarchy in Vietnam.<sup>33</sup> Thanks to his efforts Rome appointed Vicars Apostolic for Tonkin and Conchinchina,<sup>34</sup> and with them came members of the Missions Etrangères

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. For George H. Dunne, the Portuguese *Padroado* was “the worst form of Europeanism, union between mission and colonial imperialism” (*Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962) 8. Under this system, “the clergy, laity, princes, kings, and even the emperor, were forbidden to trade, or to fish, or to sail the seas” in the regions granted by successive Popes to the King of Portugal. In return the King “was required to further, as far as in him lay, the spread of Christianity in his sphere of influence. He was to send missionaries into these regions, to provide for their maintenance, to establish churches, chapels, cloisters, and other mission foundations.” Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, xxi, 48. Cửa Bạng is also known as “Port St Joseph.” See the first map between pages 4 and 5 of Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e a sua Diocese*, vol. 14, *As Missões Portuguesas no Vietnam* (Macao: Imprensa, 1977). Three years earlier, in December 1624, de Rhodes and six other Jesuits had arrived in Cua Han (Da Nang) from Macao, but the main purpose of his first sojourn in Cochinchina (1624-26) was to study the language. Ibid., 45-6.

<sup>33</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) 214; idem., “Religious Plurality in East Asia Before 1800: The Encounter Between Christianity and Asian Religions,” <http://www.dunglac.net/phandinhcho/plurality.htm> (accessed 4 January 2006) 21. De Rhodes was expelled five times from either Tonkin or Cochinchina, and in 1645, he had to leave the country for good after his death penalty was commuted to expulsion. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, xxi-xxii; Missi, “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 13. De Rhodes’ support for the establishment of native clergy in Vietnam was well ahead of his confreres in China who were hesitant to accept Chinese men into their ranks. See Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 419, 126, 142-5. Brockey argues that in China the Jesuits were reluctant to ordain Chinese priests from a wish to maintain their group identity, internal cohesion, and shared loyalty, and a fear that indigenous clergy might not “live up to their vows.” See *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724*, 143, 145, and 419. No doubt these China Jesuits still remembered the “native apostates and saboteurs who had served in their ranks in the wreckage of Japan mission.” Ibid., 143. Only in August 1688, did the Jesuit Vice-Province of China (founded in 1619) accept the first three Chinese priests. Ibid., 151. A year later, one of these priests “disappeared one night, jumping over the wall’ of the Jesuit residence in Shanghai.” Ibid. The following year, “he appeared in northern Fujian Province asking for shelter and pardon from the local Jesuits.” Ibid. As a result, “it would take over four decades and another round of harsh persecutions before native Jesuits formed a significant portion of the missionary group.” Ibid. Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong was reported to observe that in even the 1930s the missionaries still “discouraged the zealous first generation of converts from taking holy orders.” See Michael Sheridan, “Long March of an Only Son,” *The Tablet* (8 July 2006) 4. It is noteworthy to recall that the Jesuits’ “claim to sole proprietorship over Christianity in China” came to an end in 1673 when the papacy “declared China open to evangelization by secular priests, in addition to members of any Catholic religious order.” See *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724*, 126, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Peter C. Phan notes that Pope Innocent X “thought there was no better candidate for the episcopacy in Vietnam than de De Rhodes himself but the latter declined the appointment.” *Mission and Catechesis*, 67; see also Eugène Veuillot, *La Cochinchine et le Tonquin: Le Pays, l’Histoire et les Missions* (Paris: Amyot, 1859) 144. Liam Matthew Brockey contends that in 1657, the cardinals of the

de Paris.<sup>35</sup> This great missionary has often been considered as the Apostle, the Saint Paul, of the Church in Vietnam.<sup>36</sup> He left an indelible mark on the early Church in this country by establishing the institution of catechists, publishing a catechism, and completing the alphabet of the Vietnamese language.<sup>37</sup> Closing his above-mentioned *magnum opus* Peter C. Phan gave a fitting tribute to this towering figure in the early Church in Vietnam: “Founder of the Vietnamese Christianity, perfecter of the Vietnamese national script, author of the first Vietnamese theological work, and pioneer in catechesis for the Vietnamese people, de Rhodes has left a cultural and

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*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (created in 1622 to supervise missionary work), in a move “to carve up the vast jurisdictions of the archbishop of Goa,” “separated three new bishoprics from the diocese of Macau: Tonkin, Cochin China, and Nanjing. Each was governed by a Vicar Apostolic, a secular priest with the ecclesiastical powers of a bishop. Since these men had no Christian secular lords, they owed allegiance only to Rome.” See *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 156. Brockey also contends that the “primary purpose in sending the Vicars eastward was to shatter the Portuguese monopoly over Asian Catholicism. The overweening importance of the Society of Jesus in East Asia, linked directly as it was to the Padroado, needed to be downgraded if Rome was to assume true control over the Universal Church.” *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Guennou, *Missions Étrangères de Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 1986) 36; Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998) 68; Joseph Nguyen Huy Lai, *La tradition religieuse spirituelle et sociale au Vietnam: Sa confrontation avec le christianisme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981) 382-91.

<sup>36</sup> Georges Naïdenoff, “Les Chrétiens du Vietnam,” *Missi Synthèse* 2 (April 1993) 4.

<sup>37</sup> Missi, “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 13. Georges Naïdenoff argues that “le mérite immortel d’Alexandre de Rhodes est d’avoir remplacé écriture chinoise par l’alphabet latin.” See “Les Chrétiens du Vietnam,” *Missi Synthèse* 2 (April 1993) 4. Peter C. Phan notes that “with the assistance of the Propaganda Fide, de Rhodes’s *Dictionarium* (as well as *Catechismus*) was published in 1651.” See *Mission and Catechesis*, 33. Phan adds that “the Romanization of the Vietnamese language, facilitated by the European printing system, remained for two centuries a script used almost exclusively by and for Christians. It was still ignored by the majority of the people for whom the knowledge of Chinese remained a condition for professional advancement. It became widespread only under the French domination (1864-1954). In 1898 French Governor Paul Doumer signed the decree, which definitively went into effect only in 1909, mandating the use of *chu quoc ngu* [national script] in civil service examinations. In 1917 an imperial decree abolished traditional forms of education in favor of those based on the *chu quoc ngu* and French.” Peter C. Phan, *ibid.*, 34; Pham Minh Hac, “The Education System in Vietnam,” in *Higher Education in Vietnam: Change and Response*, edited by David Sloper and Le Thac Can (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian, 1995) 46-7. Đào Duy Anh notes that the traditional literary examinations, first introduced in 1705 to select future mandarins, were officially abolished in the whole of Vietnam in 1919. See *Việt Nam Văn Hoá Sử Cương* [Cultural History of Vietnam], ([Hà Nội]: Quan Hải Tùng Thư, 1938; reprint, Hồ Chí Minh City: Khoa Sử Trường Đại Học Sư Phạm TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1992) 262, 283; see also Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 24. For Stanley Karnow, “the Vietnamese rulers were particularly disturbed by the achievement of Alexandre de Rhodes, the seventeenth-century French Jesuit who perfected the simplified script *quoc ngu*, which transcribed Vietnamese, previously written in arcane Chinese ideographs, into Roman alphabet. The innovation endangered the traditional Vietnamese structure, for priests could now propagate the gospel to a wide audience, thereby weakening officials whose power reposed largely on their narrow scholarship” (*Vietnam: A History* [New York: Penguin Books, 1984] 59).

theological legacy for which the Christian Church in Vietnam and the Vietnamese people as a whole will be eternally grateful.”<sup>38</sup>

Towards the end of this first phase of the history of the Vietnamese Church there were approximately 100,000 Catholics in Vietnam with about 80,000 in Tonkin and 20,000 in Cochinchina.<sup>39</sup> This incredible success was due to the evangelising efforts of the members of the Society of Jesus, in particular Father de Rhodes, and above all, to the dedication of the laity who laboured as lay leaders and catechists during the prolonged absence of the Jesuit missionaries.<sup>40</sup> Peter C. Phan notes that as de Rhodes was working practically alone during his first mission in Tonkin from 1627 to 1630 because his companion did not speak the language, and later, in his second mission to Cochinchina from 1640 to 1645, he relied on the laity to carry out “his task of evangelisation and *plantatio ecclesiae*.”<sup>41</sup> Wherever he went, de Rhodes formed “a nucleus of lay leaders, made up of former Buddhist monks, mandarins, doctors, *licenciés*, persons of noble birth, and commoners, not only men but also women.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, right from his first sojourn to Tonkin, de Rhodes already involved lay people in teaching and governing the local Church.<sup>43</sup> He empowered lay people, “allowing them to be ‘ordinary ministers’ of baptism and encouraging them to lead the assemblies in prayers and devotions.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, they were permitted to perform “all ministries not requiring holy orders.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, later, in his second sojourn to Conchinchina, “everywhere he went, de Rhodes found vibrant Christian communities,

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<sup>38</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 202. Phan notes that in 1654 de Rhodes, born on 15 March 1593 in Avignon, “was made superior of the Jesuit mission in Persia where he died on 5 November 1660.” See *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) 214.

<sup>39</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 189. According to Peter C. Phan, in 1641 “the church in Tonkin counted 108,000 Christians and 235 churches.” *Mission and Catechesis*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 50.

<sup>44</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 102.

directed and ministered by lay people.”<sup>46</sup> Of the lay leaders, the catechists were the pillars that de Rhodes relied on to build the Church in Vietnam.<sup>47</sup> In the seventeenth century all candidates to the priesthood except for one were selected from this cohort of catechists, and some of them were counted among the first martyrs of the Church in Vietnam.<sup>48</sup> Peter C. Phan concludes that “without lay leaders like these, de Rhodes could not have accomplished what he did. Together with him, they deserved to be called the cofounders of Vietnamese Christianity.”<sup>49</sup>

### 9.2.2 Early Organisation of the Church (1659-1802)

Several important events marked the second phase of the history of the Vietnamese Church. First, Pope Alexander VII, through the decree *Super Cathedram* of 9 September 1659, established the first two dioceses in Vietnam and appointed two missionaries of the *Missionnaires Etrangères de Paris* as their Vicars Apostolic.<sup>50</sup> One of the prelates, Lambert de la Motte, ordained seven catechists to the priesthood and chaired the first Synod in Vietnam in Pho Hien (Hung Yen) in February 1670.<sup>51</sup> He also gave the statutes to the first Vietnamese female religious congregation, Dòng Mến Thánh Giá or Les Amantes de la Croix (Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross) in today’s Bù Chu and Hà Nội dioceses.<sup>52</sup> His successor, Guillaume Mahot,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>47</sup> De Rhodes established the institution of catechists in Tonkin in May 1630, and in Cochinchina on 31 July 1643. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, xxi. For the author, “the founding of the institution of catechists was a stroke of pastoral genius.” Ibid., 105.

<sup>48</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 105.

<sup>49</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 101.

<sup>50</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luộc Sứ Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 190. Liam Matthew Brockey notes that as bishops, these Vicars Apostolic “were empowered to make demands on all clergy in their appointed territories. By virtue of their vows, the Jesuits had the choice to obey or leave.” See *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 156.

<sup>51</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luộc Sứ Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 190; Jean Guennou, *Missions Etrangères de Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 1986) 163; Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 105. Two years earlier, in 1668, Mgr Lambert de la Motte ordained the first three Vietnamese priests, Joseph Trang (31 March), John Hue and Benedict Hien (15 June). Ibid., 156.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Guennou, *Missions Etrangères de Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 1986) 164; Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luộc Sứ Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 190.

became the first bishop to be consecrated in Vietnam, and, immediately after his consecration, called another Synod in October 1682.<sup>53</sup>

During this period the nascent Church in Vietnam suffered from periodic persecutions under the orders of the Trịnh and Nguyễn lords, and later under the Tây Sơn rulers. The first edict against Christianity was issued in 1630,<sup>54</sup> only three years after the establishment of Christian missions in Tonkin in 1627, and fifteen years from the beginning of organised missions in Cochinchina in 1615.

One of the significant ecclesial events that occurred during this period was the promulgation on 11 July 1742 of Pope Benedict XIV's Constitution *Ex quo singulari* which banned *inter alia* the ancestral and Confucian rites.<sup>55</sup> The consequence of this Constitution was gigantic and its impact continues to reverberate in the Churches in Asia today.<sup>56</sup> While the causes for the prohibition of Christianity were manifold—

<sup>53</sup> See Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980),” 15.

<sup>54</sup> Lê Thành Khôi, *Le Việt-Nam: Histoire et Civilisation* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955) 507.

<sup>55</sup> For the full text of this Constitution see *100 Roman Documents Relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy (1645-1941)*, translations by Donald D. St. Sure [and] edited by Ray R. Noll, (San Francisco: The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1992) 46-61. Wanting this Constitution to “remain in force, all of it lasting for all time to come,” Benedict XIV had ordered and commanded that each and every thing in it “be observed exactly, integrally, absolutely, inviolably, and unchangeably” by “each and every archbishop and bishop now living in China, and other kingdoms and provinces bordering China, or in her vicinity, as well as those who will be there at some time in the future.” Ibid., 60, 59 respectively. George Minamiki notes that the making of the *Ex quo singulari* (5 July 1742) decision “had involved in the course of a century and a half seven popes and two apostolic delegates; two Chinese emperors and their courts; the kings of Portugal, Spain, and France; the Jesuit confessor of Louis XIV; the Holy Office and the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith; the theology faculty of the Sorbonne; the Jansenists; preachers like Fenelon and Bossuet; writers like Voltaire and Leibnitz; the missionaries, their congregations, and superiors. Most important of all, it touched the lives of the Chinese Christians and affected in an irrevocable way the course of the Church in the Middle Kingdom.” *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985) ix-x. For him, this controversy “involved the whole field of cross-cultural understanding and missionary accommodation,” as at issue were two problems: “the linguistic and semantic problem of how to designate in Chinese the divinity and other spiritual concepts, and secondly the problem of the ceremonies in honor of Confucius and the ancestors.” Ibid., ix, xii. It is worth noting that the French Vicars Apostolic did not share the Jesuits' view on the Chinese Rites. See Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 157.

<sup>56</sup> For George H. Dunne, the impact of Pope Benedict XIV's Constitution *Ex quo singulari* (5 July 1742) on the nascent Church in China was two-fold: “by banning the Confucian ceremonies it made it impossible for a scholar-official to become a Christian or for a Christian to become a scholar, thus destroying the possibility of those sympathetic *rapproches* upon which, in the Jesuit method, the peaceful penetration of Chinese society had been based. By banning the ancestral rites the Church was forced to assume a posture that seemed hostile to the Chinese environment. Instead of leaven Christianity became a foreign substance in the body of Chinese social culture. It meant the effective ending of the

political, economic, cultural, moral, and religious—the most recurrent charge was that the missionaries required the Vietnamese Christians to abandon the cult of ancestors. This charge was leveled against Christians during de Rhodes' first sojourn in Cochinchina (1624-26), and became the oft-repeated charge during the persecution of Vietnamese Christians in the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> For Peter C. Phan, the cult of ancestors “provided continuity across generations and bound all the Vietnamese together, from the king as the august Son of Heaven to the humblest citizen in the country.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, “this cult of ancestors, if viewed as contrary to Christian faith, would constitute one of the most serious challenges to Christian mission,” and it would be natural for any rulers of the country to take every possible measure to proscribe Christianity if it posed a threat to this traditional practice.<sup>59</sup> Today, Vietnamese bishops generally consider that the Church's negative attitude towards the cult of ancestors was one of the main reasons for the oppressions of Christians in Vietnam.<sup>60</sup> Abandoning the cult of ancestors was often interpreted as an abandonment

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policy of cultural adaptation. If these consequences were fully understood by the Holy See, it must have felt that the integrity of faith required payment of so high a price.” See *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962) 300. Dunne reminded us that “the rites observed in honor of Confucius did not differ essentially from ancestral ceremonies. Only the scholar class, however, performed the Confucian ceremonies, whereas all Chinese observed the ancestral rites.” Ibid., 289. The interventions of the Vietnamese bishops at the 1998 Synod for Asia show that the issue of ancestor veneration continues to remain current and urgent, at least in the context of Vietnam. See, for instance, Stephen Nguyen Nhu The [Archbishop of Huế], “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124-6; Paul Nguyen Van Hoa [Bishop of Nha Trang], “Evangelization in Vietnam,” ibid., 122-4; Roland Jacques, “Le dossier des rites Chinois doit-il être rouvert?” *L'année canonique* 41 (1999) 366.

<sup>57</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 74.

<sup>58</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 75.

<sup>59</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 75. There is no doubt that the separation from family members and other Vietnamese cultural and religious communities occasioned by conversion to Catholicism has created grave difficulties. Indeed, in his intervention at the Asian Synod in 1998, Archbishop Stephen Nguyen Nhu The of Huế noted that today “we speak of the ‘veneration’ rather than ‘cult’ of ancestors in order to be more precise theologically,” and he added the unwillingness of Vietnamese Catholics to participate in the cult of ancestors in family life is “a great obstacle for evangelization.” See “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124-5.

<sup>60</sup> Speaking at the Synod for Asia Bishop Nguyen Son Lam states that “in Vietnam, the ban against ancestor worship imposed on Christians for three centuries had the effect of estrangling them from the very foundation of Vietnamese society. This explains why they were considered strangers in their own country and persecuted” (“Christian Sense of Family Coincides with Tradition,” *L'Osservatore Romano* [13 May 1998] 14). In his intervention, Bishop Paul Nguyen Van Hoa of Nha Trang asserts that “for believers of certain religions ... to become Catholic means betraying their family and even their state.” See “Evangelization in Vietnam,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124.

of one's tradition and also one's country, hence a double apostasy. It is estimated that some 30,000 were martyred during this period.<sup>61</sup> At the end of this phase, the Church in Vietnam had a clear organisational structure with three dioceses and approximately 320,000 Christians.<sup>62</sup>

### 9.2.3 Trials and Tribulations (1802-1885)

In 1802, Nguyễn Ánh, the last surviving member of the deposed Nguyễn Lords, defeated the Tây Sơn rulers and ascended to the throne, taking the dynastic name Gia Long. Under his 20-year reign the Vietnamese Church enjoyed a relative peace as the emperor was grateful to Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine and other Catholics for their support during his long campaign to regain power and unify the country.<sup>63</sup> However, bloody suppressions occurred under the reign of his three successors, commencing with the first edict issued by Minh Mạng (1820-40) in 1825.<sup>64</sup> After a few years of calm, Thiệu Trị (1841-47) issued a similar edict in 1847, in the last year of his reign.<sup>65</sup> The oppression of Christians became more severe under Tự Đức (1847-83), the next

<sup>61</sup> Trần Anh Dũng, "Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980)," 17. Peter C. Phan notes that "the years 1798-1800, under the reign of King Canh Thịnh (1792-1802), were very hard for Catholics. The king suspected that his opponent Nguyen Anh was being assisted by the French bishop Pigneau de Béhaine, who had recruited French officers and arms to help Nguyen Anh reestablish the Nguyen dynasty. Fearing Catholic collusion with his enemies, the king ordered Catholics to be killed as a preventive measure" ("Mary in Vietnamese Piety and Theology," *Theology Digest* 49:3 [Fall 2002] 247).

<sup>62</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Luận Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003)," 192.

<sup>63</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 462. Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine (1741-1799) was credited with helping Nguyễn Ánh to become the founding emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty (1802-1945), also Vietnam's last, who "ruled over almost all of the territory of present-day Vietnam." See Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 145-6, 314-5. According to D.G.E Hall, "when he died, Gia Long had enjoined upon his successor that there was to be no persecution of the three religions established in his empire—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity." See *A History of South-East Asia* (London: Macmillan Education, 1968) 685. However, Minh Mạng, his successor, "a strict Confucian and an admirer of Chinese culture," reintroduced the eighteenth century policy of suppressing believers. Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 464. Unable to suppress Christian activities, in 1838 Minh Mạng sent a delegation to France to resolve the continuing dispute over the presence of French missionaries in Vietnam. King Louis Philippe did not meet the delegation because the Church opposed it. Minh Mạng died before the delegation returned to Hue, the capital of Vietnam. Ibid., 465.

<sup>65</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 469.

emperor, who issued two edicts against Christians in 1848 and 1851.<sup>66</sup> In 1868, he issued an infamous decree dividing the population into two categories: “*lương dân*,” the good citizens, and “*dữ dân*,” those who follow Christianity.<sup>67</sup> This royal decree was followed by the devastating havoc that the Văn Thân movement inflicted on Vietnamese Catholics.<sup>68</sup> Approximately 100,000 Christians died for their faith during the reigns of these rulers from 1820 to 1883.<sup>69</sup>

#### 9.2.4 The Development of the Church (1885-1960)

The Vietnamese Golgotha came to an end with the 1884 Patenôtre Treaty, which established the protectorate of Tonkin and Annam, and guaranteed religious freedom.<sup>70</sup> According to Adrien Launay, there were approximately 648,435 Christians in Vietnam in 1889.<sup>71</sup> By 1939, this figure increased to 1,544,765 and the country's population stood at 23,193,769.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 477.

<sup>67</sup> Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980),” 19.

<sup>68</sup> Văn Thân (Scholar-Gentry), a militant political movement led by scholars in Nghệ An province in 1874, numbering approximately 3,000. Its slogan was “*Bình tây sát tả*,” meaning “Defeat the Westerners and exterminate the heretics [i.e., Catholics].” See Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 520, and Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 336. Some 60,000 Catholics were killed by this movement. See Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980),” 17.

<sup>69</sup> Some 60,000 of them were killed by the Văn Thân. See Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980),” 17. There were approximately half a million Catholics in Vietnam in 1850. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luận Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 195.

<sup>70</sup> The six provinces of Cochinchina had already been ceded to France by the Treaty of Saigon in 1862 and the Philastre Treaty in 1874, and governed directly by the French as a colony. See Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) 494-5, 517-9, and Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 312, 387-8. In the introduction to his classic book on the history of Vietnam, written in 1919, a textbook in use in South Vietnam until 1975, Trần Trọng Kim cited the following factors as the main causes for Vietnam's loss of independence and becoming a French protectorate: persecution and suppression of Christians, prohibition of foreign trade, narrow-mindedness and arrogance of court officials, and confrontational attitude towards Westerners. See *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược: (Histoire du Viet-Nam)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1949) V-VI; also 465, 476-7.

<sup>71</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luận Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 196.

<sup>72</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luận Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 198.



In 1954, after Vietnam was divided into two separate regions, approximately 650,000 Catholics went to the South, and 750,000 remained in the North with seven bishops and about 370 priests.<sup>73</sup> The ecclesial community in the North became “une Église du silence” over the next twenty-one years.<sup>74</sup> Today, to a certain extent, the northern community, which was isolated from the thinking of the universal Church,<sup>75</sup> generally reflects the conservatism of those whose preconciliar faith was severely tested by the restrictions of the Communist Government, which confiscated all the Church’s educational and social properties.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, in South Vietnam, changes initiated by the Council proceeded, albeit slowly, in the same period.<sup>77</sup> In Đà Lạt, South

<sup>73</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 199; Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Lược Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980),” 23. Stephen Denney notes that “this exodus radically changed the proportion of Catholics in North and South—before 1954 Catholics constituted about 10 percent of the population in the North and 5 percent in the South; after 1954 these figures were reversed” (“The Catholic Church in Vietnam,” in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, edited by Pedro Ramet, Christianity Under Stress, vol. 2 [London: Duke University Press, 1990] 271). For further details see the “Decimation of the Northern Church” table compiled by Peter C. Phan, “The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 502.

<sup>74</sup> Missi, “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 15; see also Chris McGillion, “Rome’s Next Domino,” *The Tablet* (25 September 1993) 1224.

<sup>75</sup> Peter C. Phan, “The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 501.

<sup>76</sup> Peter C. Phan notes that “Christian faith is nourished predominantly by the family with its practice of the daily recitation of morning and evening prayers. Prayers most often include the rosary, litanies, prayers to the patron saints (especially St Joseph), the *Miserere* (Psalm 51) for the ancestors, and the acts of faith, hope, and charity. When a priest visits the parish church, bells toll to announce the Mass” (“The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 14 [Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003] 501). Phan also observes that “in general, Vietnam Catholicism, especially among the Northerners, is heavily pietistic and ritualistic. Greatly influenced by baroque piety of Spanish and French missionaries, Vietnamese Catholics love devotions, in particular Marian devotion, veneration of saints, statues, relics, processions, pilgrimages, sodalities and other external exhibitions of faith. Knowledge of the Bible among the laity (and, sadly, among most Vietnamese priests) is practically non-existent” (“Aspects of Vietnamese Culture and Roman Catholicism: Background Information for Educators of Vietnamese Seminarians,” *Seminaries in Dialogue* 23 [Spring 1991] 7). In his view, “Vietnamese Catholicism is nourished not only by the sacraments but also by popular devotions, pilgrimages, processions, and novenas” (“Under the Bamboo Cross,” *U.S. Catholic* [July 2000] 37).

<sup>77</sup> It is worthwhile to recall one of Peter C. Phan’s insightful remarks on Vietnamese-American Catholics, an observation, in our view, is also true for Vietnamese Catholics living in other parts of the world: “Because Vietnamese Catholicism developed in dependence on the 16<sup>th</sup>-century missionary activity, it stands today between a more conservative post-Tridentine and a more progressive Vatican II Catholicism. Which side Vietnamese-American Catholics favor largely depends on their regions of origin—generally with those in the south being more open, those in the north more traditional.” See “The Dragon and the Eagle: Toward a Vietnamese-American Theology,” *Theology Digest* 48:3 (Fall 2001) 205. The scope of this thesis does not allow us to investigate the complex issue of the so-called three generations of Vietnamese Catholics in Vietnam: pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and post-Vatican II. Suffices it to note here the four characteristics of a generation: “first, its members grow up in a

Vietnam, the first Catholic University was established on 8 August 1957, followed by the first faculty of theology on 13 September 1959,<sup>78</sup> which opened its doors to lay people in 1970.<sup>79</sup>

### 9.2.5 The Maturing of the Church (1960-present)

By 1960, Vietnamese Catholics numbered approximately 2,096,540 representing 7.17% of the population.<sup>80</sup> However, figures alone do not tell the full story, for the Church in South Vietnam at this time was represented by institutions whose influence

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relatively specific social context.... Second, they are born during a specific period of time. A generation usually spans a period of about twenty years. Third, members of a generation have a set of distinctive experiences during their formative years.... During these years, members of a generation have experiences that set them apart from other generations. Finally...these experiences...leave imprints that affect the rest of people's lives." James D. Davidson, "Religion and Society: Two Sides of the Same Coin: Part I," in *Theology and the Social Sciences*, edited by Michael Horace Barnes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 198.

<sup>78</sup> Trần Anh Dũng, "Sử Lược Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980)," 23, 24. The purpose of this faculty of theology was given by Pope Paul VI in his letter to the Bishops of Vietnam on 15 September 1966: "The establishment of a Faculty of Theology in the 'St. Pius X' Pontifical Institute at Dalat will stimulate, in this decisive post-conciliar period, all men of good will to strive toward the realization of the Pauline motto "*veritatem facientes in caritate*" (Ph 4:15), and will be a place of gathering to give value, in the light of the Gospel, to the rich philosophic and religious patrimony of the nation. Such a reality will certainly contribute to amalgamating heterogeneous and until now divided groups, in the seeking of the common good." See *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, edited by Francesco Gioia (Boston, Mass.: Pauline Books & Media, 1997) 143. For the full text in Vietnamese see Paul VI, "Sứ Điệp Đức Thánh Cha gọi Hàng Giám mục, Linh mục và Giáo dân Việt Nam (1966)" [The Pope's Message to the Vietnamese Bishops, Priests, and Lay People] in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 179-84; for the original version in French see "Lettre du pape Paul VI aux évêques du Vietnam [15 September 1966]," [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/letters/1966/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_let\\_19660930\\_vescovi-vietnam\\_fr.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/letters/1966/documents/hf_p-vi_let_19660930_vescovi-vietnam_fr.html) (accessed 22 June 2007).

<sup>79</sup> See Trần Đình Quảng, "Vài nét về Giáo Hoàng Học Viện Thánh Piô X Đà Lạt [Outline of the St. Pius X Pontifical College, Da Lat]," <http://www.vietcatholic.net> (accessed 22 June 2007). This Pontifical College was confiscated by the Communist government in late 1977, and in a response (17 January 1994) to the VEC's request for its return for the use of theological training, the governmental Committee on Religious Affairs stated that the buildings "were being used for nuclear research and that the request that they be returned to the Church would be taken into consideration in the future." See Peter C. Phan, "The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 505. The VEC made the same request again in 1995 and 1997. See La Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam, "La majorité de nos demandes sont restées sans réponse," *La Documentation Catholique* 2130 (21 January 1996) 96; see also "Thư gửi Ngài Thủ Tướng Chính phủ của Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (11-10-1997) [Letter to His Excellency the Prime Minister from the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (11-10-1997)]," in *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)* [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 1980-2000], 533.

<sup>80</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003)," 199. The total population in the country was estimated at 29,200,000. Ibid.

far surpassed its population. Organisations sponsored by the Church ran one university, 93 secondary schools, 1,122 primary schools, 58 orphanages, 48 hospitals, 35 homes for the aged, 8 leprosia, 159 dispensaries helping 1,870, 073.<sup>81</sup> Although it is difficult to gauge the effects of such work, Catholic lay people became an important force in the bureaucracy, education, commerce, and the professions.<sup>82</sup> This year also saw the establishment of the Vietnamese hierarchy by Pope John XXIII. From 1962 to 1965, nine bishops of the Vietnamese Church participated in the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. Conciliar teachings gradually permeated the life of the Church in South Vietnam, and lay people began to claim and assume their rightful place in the Church. Their role was strengthened when the entire country came under the Communist control on 30 April 1975 and, as a result, clerical activities were strictly limited. On 19 June 1998, Pope John Paul II canonised 117 Vietnamese martyrs, of which 58 were lay people.<sup>83</sup>

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Church is facing a new set of challenges, occasioned by the monumental changes emanating from the decision of the Communist Party of Vietnam to adopt a market-oriented economy while retaining its absolute political control.<sup>84</sup> Our assessment is that the country is still very far from achieving the balance and harmony between economic efficiency, social justice, and

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<sup>81</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003),” 200. Omer Degrijse notes that the “Société missionnaire vietnamienne” was founded in 1973. See “The Third World Churches are Becoming Missionary,” *Communio* 26:4 (Winter 1989) 587.

<sup>82</sup> Both presidents in the South Vietnamese Government were Catholics: Ngô Đình Diệm (1955-1963) and Nguyễn Văn Thiệu (1967-75). The second Catholic university, named Minh Đức, was established in Saigon in early 1970s.

<sup>83</sup> Thu Bui and K.I. Rabenstein, “Martyrs of Vietnam,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 491-9; see also Peter Nguyen Van Hai, “Canonization of 117 Vietnamese Martyrs on June 19, 1988,” *Annals Australia* (April 1988) 8-10.

<sup>84</sup> The Economist, “Plenty to Smile About,” *The Economist* (31 March 2007) 29. In 2000 Bill Clinton was the first president to visit Vietnam since the fall of Saigon after having lifted America’s trade embargo in 1994 and restored diplomatic relations a year later. See The Economist, “Good Morning At Last,” *The Economist* (3 August 2006), [http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=7252940](http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=7252940) (accessed 17 July 2007). On 11 January 2007, Vietnam became the 150<sup>th</sup> member of the World Trade Organisation. See Patrizia Tumbarello, “WTO Membership Strengthens Vietnam’s Outlook,” *IMF Survey* 36:2 (29 January 2007) 23. Nguyen Vu Tung notes that “Vietnam has remained committed to ASEAN since it joined in 1995” (“Vietnam’s Membership of ASEAN: A Constructivist Interpretation,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29:3 [December 2007] 499).

individual freedom.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Vietnam is increasingly beset and burdened with numerous social problems,<sup>86</sup> including the widening gap between the rich and the poor,<sup>87</sup> the migration of people to the urban areas,<sup>88</sup> the exploitation of women,<sup>89</sup> the exposure to Western cultures and the decline in traditional values,<sup>90</sup> the corruption and abuse of powers by officials,<sup>91</sup> the erosion of Party and Government legitimacy,<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> For John Maynard Keynes (*Liberalism and Labour*, 1926), “the political problem of mankind is to combine three things: economic efficiency, social justice and individual liberty.” Quoted by Julie Clague, “The Gospel of Life: John Paul II on Spiritual Malaise and its Social Aftermath,” in *The New Politics: Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Paul Vallely (London: SCM Press, 1998) 121-2. Our observation is that one of the greatest challenges facing Vietnam is the reconciliation between the unity of country and the individual freedom as expressed by the two inscriptions which flank the massive Victor Emmanuel Monument at the heart of old Rome: “to the unity of the country” and “to the freedom of the citizens.”

<sup>86</sup> VEC Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Nguyen Nhu The, “La Vie Religieuse au Vietnam: Perspectives,” Dossiers et documents no. 1. *Eglises d’Asie* 191 (January 1995), <http://www.eglasiemepasie.org> (accessed 8 December 2006). According to the CIA’s estimate, in terms of household income or consumption by percentage share, the lowest 10% of the population has only 2.9% while the highest 10% enjoys a whopping 28.9%. See Central Intelligence Agency, “Vietnam [last updated on 24 January 2008],” in *The World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html> (accessed 1 February 2008). Vo X. Han observes that “the proportion of households below the poverty line in the highlands was four times greater than the national average” (“Vietnam in 2007: A Profile in Economic and Socio-Political Dynamism,” *Asian Survey* 48:1 [January-February 2008] 31). Han notes that in 2007, “the average income of farmers in a four-person household was VND 175,000 (\$10.85) per month, far below the current official poverty line of VND 260,000 (\$16.12). Ibid., 30.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Kham Van Nguyen notes that between 1994-1999 “around 1.2 million people migrated from rural to urban areas.” See his project in ministry, “A Training Program for Animators of Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam,” (Doctor of Ministry, the Catholic University of America, 2004) 15; The Economist, “Voting for More of the Same,” *The Economist* (19 May 2007) 31.

<sup>89</sup> Rosanne Rushing, “Migration and Sexual Exploitation in Vietnam,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 15:4 (2006) 471-94. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn listed other social evils such as drug abuse, HIV/AIDS victims, prostitution, and abortion. See “Trách nhiệm đối với giới trẻ Việt Nam [Responsibility for Vietnamese Youth],” *Định Hướng* (Summer 2003) 59.

<sup>90</sup> VEC, “‘Be Christians Worthy of the Name’: Pastoral Letter of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference [1992],” *Catholic International* 4:2 (February 1992) 71.

<sup>91</sup> Brian J.M. Quinn, “Vietnam’s Last Call for Bribes,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (June 2006) 52; Martin Gainsborough, “Corruption and the Politics of Economic Decentralisation in Vietnam,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 33:1 (2003) 69-84; Adam Fford, “Vietnam in 2003: The Road to Ungovernability?” *Asian Survey* 44:1 (January-February 2004) 126-7; Regina M. Abrami, “Vietnam in 2002: On the Road to Recovery,” *Asian Survey* 43:1 (January-February 2003) 97; Hy V. Luong, “Vietnam in 2005: Economic Momentum and Stronger State-Society Dialogue,” *Asian Survey* 46:1 (January 2006) 152; “Vietnam in 2006: Stronger Global Integration and Resolve for Better Governance,” *Asian Survey* 47:1 (January 2007) 173; The Economist, “Grappling with Success,” *The Economist* (2 February 2008) 34.

<sup>92</sup> The Economist, “Manh Alive,” *The Economist* (29 April 2006) 34. David Koh argues that “like its counterpart in China, the Vietnamese Communist Party believes that economic performance is the key pillar of its legitimacy, allowing for the Party to brush aside concerns about the lack of political

the restriction of religious liberty and human rights,<sup>93</sup> and the pervasive and increasing social surveillance.<sup>94</sup> These dynamics of changes have been impinging on the mission of the Church and will have a great impact on the role of the Vietnamese laity in the third millennium.

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reforms.” See “Vietnam Must Map Its Own Flight Plan,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* 169:10 (December 2006) 54. In an interview of a group of young people in 2002 about the changes in Vietnamese society, one young woman said: “I don’t want to be a model citizen [cong dan mau] like my parents—I want to be a model [nguoi mau]!” See Nguyen Bich Thuan and Mandy Thomas, “Young Women and Emergent Postsocialist Sensibilities in Contemporary Vietnam,” *Asian Studies Review* 28:2 (June 2004) 144. In a survey published in the Tết [Vietnamese New Year] issue of the *Tuổi Trẻ* [Youth] magazine, young people were asked to name their idols: “Bill Gates (89%) led the list, followed by Hồ Chí Minh with 39%, Gen. Võ Nguyên Giáp 35%, Bill Clinton 6.5%, PM Phan Văn Khải (3.2%), Hilary Clinton (3.2%).” See Đặng Tươi et al., “Idols of Young Vietnamese,” *Indochina Chronology* 20:2 (April-June 2001) 24; see also The Economist, “Adeste fideles,” *The Economist* (22 June 1991) 27. In 2007 the Economist observes that “the party remains terrified of the slightest challenge to its monopoly on power” and “treats pro-democracy activists as common criminals, jailing them for supposed spying and sabotage” even though “the National Assembly, once a rubber stamp, has become a forum for real debate and scrutiny” and “serious criticisms of the government are aired and reported in the press.” See “Plenty to Smile About,” *The Economist* (31 March 2007) 29.

<sup>93</sup> Despite their positive *ad limina* report in 2002, the Vietnamese bishops noted that the Vietnamese regime still “insists on veto power over the appointment of bishops,” and “in practice, the level of religious freedom varies from region to region, depending on the attitude of local Communist officials.” See The Tablet, “Hope for the Church in Vietnam,” *The Tablet* (2 February 2002) 33. For Bùi Tín, in Vietnam today, “freedom of the press, of self-expression, of religion and the right to vote are considered subversive” (“Fifty Years On,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* [13 May 2004] 55). This former senior officer and correspondent in the Northern Vietnamese army, and a defector since 1990, notes that in Vietnam, “words like ‘humanism’, ‘humanity’, or even ‘life’ had a very different meaning from how we normally understand them.” Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> In November 2006, the U.S. Department of State “lifted the country’s designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for Religious Freedom” “in recognition of ‘significant improvements towards advancing religious freedom’.” See U.S. Department of State, “Vietnam: International Religious Freedom Report 2007,” <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90159.htm> (accessed 28 February 2008). However, the report notes that “despite progress during the reporting period, problems remained in the implementation of the country’s legal framework on religion.” Ibid. In the same year, Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ International Policy Committee, noted that “the Church in Vietnam, while still suffering restrictions in its pastoral life, has nevertheless reported a continuing improved relationship with the government.” See “Vietnam: The Impact of Improving Trade Relations,” *Origins* 26:14 (14 September 2006) 226. He also recalled that “in testimony to the U.S. Congress,” the American Catholic Bishops have encouraged “stronger ties between the United States and Vietnam that include closer trading relationships.” Ibid. According to Martin Bell, in 2005 Vietnam has some 5,000 internet cafés. See “It Could Have Been Me,” *New Statesman* (23 October 2006) 3. Hy V. Luong observes that “the Vietnamese government required public Internet users to show identification cards and Internet shop owners to maintain a list of users’ names” (“Vietnam in 2006: Stronger Global Integration and Resolve for Better Governance,” *Asian Survey* 47:1 [January 2007] 174). In fact, “Internet-café owners are being made agents of the state as it tries to keep the lid on news, information and any signs of cyberdissent.” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, “Editorials: Trying to Kill a Revolution,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (24 June 2004) 8. In terms of human rights rating, in 1991 Vietnam was given a 27% with the average being 62%, and Australia achieving 91%. See *World Human Rights Guide*, edited by Charles Humana (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 361, xvii; see also Abdelfattah Amor, “Une enquête sur la situation religieuse au Vietnam,” *Dossiers et documents*, no. 6, *Eglises d’Asie* 289 (June 1999), <http://www.eglasiemepasie.org> (accessed 8 December 2006).



Indeed, from our rapid historical journey in this section, which of necessity left untouched much material of interest, we note that the Catholic Church in Vietnam has moved from being a predominantly lay-led Church in the first three hundred years, due in part to recurrent persecutions and prolonged absence of the missionaries,<sup>95</sup> and became a clergy-dominated Church from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the country became a protectorate of France. However, from the 1980s there have been encouraging signs that once again lay people are empowered to take a more active role in the life and mission of the Church.<sup>96</sup> Throughout these centuries of mission, the Vietnamese Church has been entangled in the political vicissitudes of the nation, and its members, especially the laity, suffered years of hardships and persecutions.<sup>97</sup> Today, 475 years after a Western missionary under the name of “I-nê-khu” landed on a seaside village in Nam Định, the mood of the Church in Vietnam is optimistic and cautiously enthusiastic.<sup>98</sup> There is no longer clamour among the majority of clergy for a return to a Church dominated by the ordained and religious. Rather, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, there is a collective desire to develop a more inclusive Church where the laity can take a fuller role in the life and mission of the Church. In his address to the bishops of Vietnam in 2002, Pope John Paul II states that, by their credible and enthusiastic witness, Vietnamese lay people today are worthy heirs of

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<sup>95</sup> Missi, “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 12-5.

<sup>96</sup> See Nguyễn Văn Nội, “Công Đồng Vatican II với Giáo Hội Việt Nam [The Second Vatican Council and the Vietnamese Church,” *Triết Đạo* [Journal of Vietnamese Philosophy and Religion] 5:3 (Spring 2003) 101-24.

<sup>97</sup> Pope John Paul II paid tribute to the sufferings that the Church in Vietnam had undergone: “Marked by the holiness and martyrdom of so many of her children, she has become a Church glorified by their zeal in the service of God and their brothers and sisters.” See “Vietnamese Church Has Given Heroic Witness to Christ’s Love,” [the Pope’s *ad limina apostolorum* address to the Vietnamese Bishops], *L’Osservatore Romano* 2 (8 January 1997) 9. Pope Benedict XVI also reflected on the heroic witness of Paul Le Bao Tinh, a nineteenth-century Vietnamese martyr, in his second encyclical *Spe Salvi*, released in late 2007. See “Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on Christian Hope,” no. 37, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html) (accessed 11 January 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Meeting with the Pope on their *ad limina* visit to Rome in January 2002, the Vietnamese bishops “presented a generally positive report of church life in Vietnam” (The Tablet, “Hope for the Church in Vietnam,” *The Tablet* [2 February 2002] 33). Peter C. Phan also observes that “despite its external difficulties, the Vietnamese Catholic Church is vibrant and dynamic.” See “The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 507.

those who went before them in the path of the Gospel.<sup>99</sup> To understand the VEC's theology of the laity and the vitality of the Church we will review the 1980 pastoral letter, a *magna carta* that the bishops of Vietnam offered to the people of God at a critical juncture in the history of the Church in Vietnam.

### 9.3 The 1980 Watershed

There is no doubt that the 1980 pastoral letter of the Vietnamese bishops is a profoundly missionary and courageous statement in that it places an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of lay people. Its central theological motif is, as we stated above, "living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of our compatriots."<sup>100</sup> The rich connotations of such a statement reflect a sense of the role of the Church in an unprecedented juncture in the history of the country. It is distilled from a period of sustained theological reflection from 1975 to 1980,<sup>101</sup> and draws on the extensive experience of the ecclesial community in North Vietnam—one that had already lived under the Communist regime for over two decades. It hints at the ambiguity and tension inherent in the situation: the bishops wanted to be faithful to the Church's mission and also endeavoured to accommodate the aims of a new Government in regard to the reconstruction of a new society.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Johannes Paul II, "Ansprache von Johannes Paul II. Aus Anlaß des 'ad limina'–Besuches der Bischöfe von Vietnam, Dienstag, 22. Januar, 2002," no. 6, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2002/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20020122\\_viet-nam-ad-limina\\_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020122_viet-nam-ad-limina_ge.html) (accessed 30 May 2006).

<sup>100</sup> See VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 14.

<sup>101</sup> From 15 to 20 December 1975, twenty-one South Vietnamese bishops met for the first time after "the country has been completely liberated" (the opening sentence), and issued a short communiqué to the faithful in the South stating that their focus was to listen and to understand. See *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 251-4. In July 1976, they met again and issued their first pastoral letter, fifteen months after "the country has been completely liberated" (no. 3) and "entirely independent and unified" (no. 6), urging the faithful to journey with the people (no. 1), to engage in the world (no. 4), to be present in the midst of the people and to serve them (no. 5). They also encouraged lay people to sanctify themselves by living the Gospel through their engagement in secular affairs (no. 9), and stress that the central pastoral activity in the parish should be the education of faith (no. 9). See *ibid.*, 255-65. While acknowledging that there are fundamental differences between Christianity and Marxism-Leninism, the bishops did not see them as obstacles for dialogue and sincerely collaboration between those who want to serve the people (no. 7). *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>102</sup> Jean Maïs notes that the Vietnamese bishops managed to gloss over the official slogans that the government has pressured them to insert into the first pastoral letter. See "Première réunion de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam et preparation de la lettre commune," *Flashes sur le Vietnam* (October 1980) 3.

This ambiguity and tension can be detected in two diverging interpretations of the statement in question: one emanated from a former Vietnamese Prime Minister, and the other from the then Archbishop of Saigon. In an interview granted to the editor-in-chief of the Government-sanctioned weekly *Công Giáo và Dân Tộc* (Catholicism and Nation), Vietnamese Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt explicated his understanding of the phrase. For him, it simply means that religion must take care of life.<sup>103</sup> In his view, living the Gospel is to serve the happiness of all compatriots and not just people who belong to a religion.<sup>104</sup> This involves adopting a life-long commitment, walking the same rhythm with the people, respecting the rights of all, honouring national independence, upholding state legislation, and being concerned with problems confronting the nation, including issues relating to Church-state relations.<sup>105</sup> He went on to praise Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình of Hồ Chí Minh City.<sup>106</sup> According to the former prime minister, the Archbishop had sincerely adopted this vision, even if not all the bishops were so convinced, so as to fall short of implementing such a programme in their respective dioceses.<sup>107</sup> This official interpretation of the theological phrase is in marked contrast with the one given by Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình himself, who emphasises service as the main element of the message.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Eglises d'Asie, "Entretien de M. Vo Van Kiet, chef du gouvernement, sur un certain nombre de questions touchant le catholicisme." *Eglises d'Asie* 173 (16 March 1994), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006). This report appeared previously in the weekly *Công Giáo và Dân Tộc* [Catholicism and Nation] (27 February 1994).

<sup>104</sup> My free translation of the French text; *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* It is important to remember that in Vietnam, relations between the Communist Government and the Catholic Church are not a bilateral relationship but a tripartite, one involving the regime, the local Church, and the Holy See.

<sup>106</sup> In June 1987, Nguyễn Văn Linh, Communist Party General Secretary (1986-91), also sent a personal letter to the Archbishop, "who is known to generally favour co-operation with civil authorities, congratulating him on completing 50 years of service. Binh was also awarded the Ho Chi Minh City Badge." See Asiaweek, "Mixed Blessings for the Church," *Asiaweek* (20 November 1987) 30. For a detailed discussion of the "conciliatory" approach of Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình, see Stephen Denney, "The Catholic Church in Vietnam," in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, edited by Pedro Ramet, Christianity Under Stress, vol. 2 (London: Duke University Press, 1990) 281-3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* While in Hồ Chí Minh City, on an official trip, Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt took time off from his business to visit Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình who was receiving medical treatment in the Thong Nhat Hospital. See [BBC], "Vo Van Kiet Visits Hospitalized Catholic Archbishop," in *BBC Monitoring: Summary of World Broadcasts* (14 August 1993) FE/1767 B/8.

<sup>108</sup> Eglises d'Asie, "Après vingt années d'attente: Une interview de Mgr Paul Nguyen Van Binh [Archbishop of Saigon]," *Eglises d'Asie* 199 (16 May 1995), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed



Indeed, in a 1995 interview published in the Sài Gòn Giải Phóng [Saigon Liberated], the Communist Party's daily for Hồ Chí Minh City, the prelate declared that the orientation of the Catholic Church in Vietnam condensed in the summary statement was the right pastoral direction at that time, and he prayed that the Church would take advantage of all new opportunities to present more clearly the face of a servant Church.<sup>109</sup> For him, a triumphant or powerful Church only creates envy and fear. On the contrary, a servant Church will be welcomed by all, especially in a country like Vietnam that needs this service and values it highly.<sup>110</sup> With these two interpretations serving as an introductory remark, this section will briefly survey the content and structure of the 1980 pastoral letter and proceed with a critical analysis of its theology of the laity and its underlying ecclesiological framework.

### 9.3.1 Overview of the Content and Structure of the 1980 Pastoral Letter

In terms of content and structure, the 1980 pastoral letter of the VEC consists of four parts and fifteen sections. In Part One (nos. 1-4),<sup>111</sup> which deals mainly with general Church business, the Vietnamese bishops ask all the faithful to join them in thanking God for the first plenary assembly that they longed to hold ever since the establishment of the Vietnamese Catholic hierarchy by Pope John XXIII in 1960,<sup>112</sup> and more so, since the formal unification of the country in 1976. The bishops also express their thanks to the Government for supporting and facilitating the plenary meeting. The purpose of their week-long gathering, say the bishops, was to pray and to reflect on the mission of the Church at a historic turning-point of the country. After a brief mention of the meaning of their forthcoming *ad limina* visit and their

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15 December 2006); originally published in the daily "Sai Gon Giai Phong" [Saigon liberated], a publication of the Communist Party in Ho Chi Minh City.

<sup>109</sup> My loose translation of the French text; *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> My broad translation of the French original; *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, nos. 1-4.

<sup>112</sup> John XXIII established the Vietnamese Catholic hierarchy by his Apostolic Constitution *Venerabilium Nostrorum* dated 24 November 1960. See [John XXIII], "Sắc Chi *Venerabilium Nostrorum* Thiết Lập Hàng Giáo Phẩm Việt Nam [Apostolic Constitution *Venerabilium Nostrorum* on the Establishment of the Vietnamese Hierarchy]," in Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference]. *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 235-9.

attendance at the Synod of Bishops on the Christian family, they highlight the importance of the establishment of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference as an ecclesial institution that would enable them to fulfil their duties more effectively. Finally, the prelates note that they had gone to pay their respects at the mausoleum of Hồ Chí Minh, and to visit the Prime Minister prior to the conclusion of their plenary assembly.

Part Two, comprising seven sections, explicates the VEC's pastoral direction under two major headings: "A Church for the People" (nos. 5-7), and "A Church in the Midst of the People" (nos. 8-11). In the first section (no. 5) the bishops discuss the pastoral direction of the Church in Vietnam. Here, they recall three major concerns that Pope Paul VI raised in his first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, namely the Church's self-knowledge, its renewal, and its dialogue with the world.<sup>113</sup> They suggest that all Church members should meditate on these ideas every day. The next section (no. 6) provides a brief exposition of their understanding of Vatican II's conception of the Church as the people of God. This is followed by an explication of the mission of the Church in Vietnam, which is to continue the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ who has come to serve and not to be served (no. 7). Following the teaching of John Paul II's first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, which offers a lucid vision of a Christological anthropology, the bishops insist that for the Church all ways lead to mankind.<sup>114</sup> In section 8, their reflection starts with an affirmation that, in order to fulfil this mission, the Vietnamese Church must be the Church of Jesus Christ in the midst of the people. They go on to reflect on the meaning of this pastoral direction for the Church *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Commenting on the solidarity of the Church with all peoples in Vietnam, the bishops declare that the country itself is the place where all the faithful are called to live their vocation as children of God and to serve as both citizens and members of the Church (no. 9). This solidarity translates into two concrete tasks. First, Church members must actively work with all people to defend and develop the

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<sup>113</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 5; see also Paul VI, "*Ecclesiam Suam*," in *The Papal Encyclicals 1958-1981*, edited by Claudia Carlen Ihm ([USA]: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981) 135-60. Hereafter only the title is cited, followed by relevant numbers.

<sup>114</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 7; see also John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 14 (Melbourne: A.C.T.S. Publications, 1979) 24-6.

country (no. 10). Second, they must build up in the Church a lifestyle and an expression of faith that conforms with the tradition of the nation (no. 11).

In Part Three, the Vietnamese bishops send separate messages to the laity (no. 12), the religious (no. 13), and the priests (no. 14), explaining their specific vocation and mission. Finally, they close the pastoral letter with a brief reflection on the past, the present, and the future, and encourage Church members to rely on the love of God, the life-giving Word of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit, and hence to have the courage to face reality and to trust in the future (Part Four, no. 15). This seminal document is replete with theological insights and these will be examined in detail in the following section.

### **9.3.2 Critical Analysis of the VEC's Theology of the Laity in the 1980 Pastoral Letter**

Like all other pastoral documents issued by the VEC to date, the 1980 pastoral letter bears the marks of the times in which it was composed. Therefore, it must be evaluated in light of the circumstances in which it was written and the concrete problems it aimed to address, along with the conciliar and papal documents that it draws from, in particular *Gaudium et Spes*, and the first encyclicals of Paul VI and John Paul II. Any attempt to sketch the VEC's theology in this pastoral letter must, first of all, take into account the fact that it did not purport to offer a systematic presentation, and developed only certain topics of current relevance. It aimed to unite the Church, clarify its evangelising mission, and exhort all Church members, in particular lay people, to practice a more intense Christian life in a country run by an avowedly atheistic Government. Secondly, given these pastoral and practical concerns, a careful analysis of the theology proposed in this letter must pay attention to its underlying assumptions, motifs, and emphases. Thirdly, this orientation suggests the need to adopt a hermeneutical approach that takes into consideration the intended mixed audience of the letter, and also distinguishes between what was meant from what was actually written. Indeed, besides its primary audience—all members of the Vietnamese Church—this historic letter was meant to convey a positive message of dialogue and cooperation to the Communist Government. This mixed audience explains the peculiarity of some of the statements of the pastoral letter: it mingles

elements of the bishops' theology of mission and ecclesiology with issues relating to the Government's policies and directions. Hence, to unravel their double-layered meaning, we will have to reckon with the varied nuances of the bishops' thoughtful expressions by delving into the historical and linguistic tradition of the country in order to explicate the meaning of its key terms. In this sense, our presentation of the VEC's theology, in particular its theology of the laity, will be both descriptive and evaluative. Finally, as the composition of the pastoral letter occurred against the backdrop of a political instability and an economic decline which were due in no small part to Vietnam's overthrow of the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea in 1979, the year of calamity,<sup>115</sup> and the subsequent war against the Chinese invasion, we also find it necessary to revisit the political and social context of Vietnam in the periods surrounding the momentous year 1980.

Addressing to the entire people of God in an unprecedented period of social and political upheaval in the history of the country the bishops of Vietnam summarise their first pastoral letter and the mission of the Church in a single statement: "Sống Phúc Âm giữa lòng dân tộc để phục vụ hạnh phúc của đồng bào" ["Living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of our compatriots"].<sup>116</sup> This motif encompasses three concepts of "service," "solidarity," and "witness of life," a threefold theme that expresses their preferred mode of engagement and dialogue with the Vietnamese society. The role of the lay faithful, as both loyal members of the Church and good citizens of the country, is further differentiated in that their call to holiness is related to the fulfilment of their temporal duties. These constitutive elements of the mission of the Church are derived from this motif with "witness of life" corresponding to "living the Gospel," "solidarity" paralleling "in the midst of the people," and "service" being a shorthand summary of the phrase "for the service of the happiness of our compatriots." While these theological concepts are not new and in fact, were all drawn from various conciliar and papal documents, the Vietnamese bishops have combined them to give a compelling expression to the mission of the Church at a critical juncture in the history of the country. Therefore, to make an overall assessment of the 1980 pastoral letter, there are three points to note:

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<sup>115</sup> John C. Donnell, "Vietnam 1979: Year of Calamity," *Asian Survey* 20:1 (January 1980) 19-25.

<sup>116</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 14.

- the etymological explication of the key terms employed in the summary statement;
- the alignment of the 1980 pastoral letter with the conciliar and papal teachings; and,
- the political and social situations of Vietnam at the time.

As the king-pin of the 1980 pastoral letter, the summary statement, which comprises a string of Vietnamese and *Hán-Việt* or Sino-Vietnamese terms,<sup>117</sup> calls for a detailed etymological examination. The term “dân tộc” is derived from a combination of two Sino-Vietnamese words: the first means “people in a country or in a region,” and the second denotes “extended family.” Depending on the context of its occurrence in the 1980 pastoral letter, this term can be translated as “people,” “nation,” or “race.” In section 11 for instance, this term refers to each of the various ethnic groups that live in Vietnam. The term “đồng bào” is also formed by a juxtaposition of two Sino-Vietnamese words which mean “of the same placenta,” and denote, in a narrow sense, children of the same father and mother, and in a broader sense, people of the same country.<sup>118</sup> It was translated into Latin as “*germani fratres*” in an influential 18<sup>th</sup> century dictionary.<sup>119</sup> The Sino-Vietnamese term “hạnh phúc” denotes “happiness,”

<sup>117</sup> Sino-Vietnamese is a term used “to describe the vocabulary and writing system borrowed from Chinese.” See Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 339. It is estimated that, as a result of centuries of contact with the Chinese culture and languages, approximately 60 per cent of Vietnamese vocabulary comes from Chinese, even though Vietnamese, the official language of Vietnam, generally considered to be an Austroasiatic language, is not related to Chinese. See Andrew Dalby, *Dictionary of Languages: The Definite Reference to More Than 400 Languages* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) 668.

<sup>118</sup> See Đào Duy Anh, *Hán Việt Từ Điển Giản Yếu* [Chinese Vietnamese Concise Dictionary], revised by Phan Bội Châu, ([Hà Nội]: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 1931), s.v. “Bào,” “Đồng,” and “Đồng bào,” 51, 276; see also Léopold Cadière, *Croyances et Pratiques Religieuses des Annamites*, [volume 3], (Paris: Ecole Française D’Extrême-Orient, 1957) 155.

<sup>119</sup> *Dictionarium Anamitico-Latinum: Primitus Inceptum ab Illustrissimo et Reverendissimo Episcopo Adranensi, Vicariio Apostolico Concincine*, edited by J.L. Taberd, Episcopo Isaupolitano, *Vicariio Apostolico Concincine, Cambodie, et Ciampe, Asiaticae Societatis Parisiensis, nec non Bengalensis, Socio Honorario* (Serampore [Bengal, India]: Fredericnagori Vulgo Serampore, 1838), s.v. “Đồng bào,” 149. This dictionary was conceived and written between 1772 and 1773 by Monsignor Pigneau de Béhaine, Bishop of Adran, and edited and published by Monsignor Jean-Baptiste Louis Taberd in 1838, with the editorial assistance of Vietnamese seminarian Philip Phan Văn Minh, produced by a Protestant printer, with the financial assistance of the British Government, and the general support from the English-Indian Scientific Society. See two introductory texts by Trần Văn Toàn, “*Tư-Vị và Di-Sản Văn Hóa Việt-Nam* [Dictionary and Vietnamese Cultural Heritage],” and Louis Malleret, “*Note sur les dictionnaires de Mgr Taberd publiés au Bengal en 1838.*” Ibid., l-li and lvi-lx1.

emanating from two discrete words, which mean respectively “luck” and “good things” such as wealth, nobility, and longevity.<sup>120</sup> It occupies a third place, after the words “độc lập” (independence) and “tự do” (liberty), in a trio of terms that are printed on all official documents and emblems under the official name of the country, namely the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. There is no doubt that the Vietnamese bishops had this ubiquitous term “hạnh phúc” in mind when they deliberated on the choice of words to express the theme and the summary statement of the 1980 pastoral letter.

Unlike these last three Sino-Vietnamese terms, the phrase “giữa lòng” (nos. 13 and 14) or “trong lòng” (no. 8) is a pure Vietnamese construct which means, in a psychological and moral sense, “in the midst of” or “in the heart of” respectively. In a physiological sense, the words “giữa” and “trong” denote respectively “in the middle” or “at the centre,” and the term “lòng” refers to the heart or the viscera.<sup>121</sup> Like the term “đồng bào,” this prepositional phrase connotes a sense of togetherness and solidarity.

By employing such evocative terms and linking them with the concepts of “living the Gospel,” “solidarity,” and “service,” the catch-phrase of the 1980 pastoral letter encapsulates the VEC’s seismic shift from a Church primarily concerned with securing its own institutional wellbeing, to one willing to move with the world.<sup>122</sup> This theological posture is moreover anchored in the long tradition of Catholic mission and social thought, which culminates in the teaching of Vatican II. This

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<sup>120</sup> Đào Duy Anh, *Hán Việt Từ Điển Giản Yếu* [Chinese Vietnamese Concise Dictionary], revised by Phan Bội Châu, ([Hà Nội]: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 1931), s.v. “Hạnh,” “Phúc,” and “Hạnh phúc,” 315, 625.

<sup>121</sup> For an interesting discussion of the various meanings of the term “lòng,” see Léopold Cadière, *Croyances et Pratiques Religieuses des Annamites*, [volume 3], (Paris: Ecole Française D’Extrême-Orient, 1957) 147-55.

<sup>122</sup> It is likely that, in time, this phrase will become a topic of significant interest for Vietnamese ecclesiologists, in some fashion similar to the term “*subsistit in*” in *Lumen Gentium* no.8. With respect to this latter term, Gérard Philips predicted that “l’expression latine: *subsistit in* (l’Église du Christ se trouve dans la Catholica) fera couler des flots d’encre.” Cited by Karim Schelkens, “*Lumen Gentium*’s ‘*Subsistit In*’ Revisited: The Catholic Church and Christian Unity After Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 893, footnote no. 63; see also Francis A. Sullivan, “The Meaning of *Subsistit In* as Explained by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 116; Gérard Philips, *L’Église et son mystère au IIème Concile du Vatican: Histoire, texte, et commentaire de la constitution Lumen gentium*, vol. 1 (Paris: Desclée, 1967-1968) 119.

tradition postulates that the human person and human dignity, realised in community and solidarity with others and with the whole of God's creation, are the norms against which every political institution and all aspects of social and economic life must be measured. Therefore, we will examine the pastoral letter with a focus on the primacy of the human person, and explore the fuller implication of this theological approach under five interrelated elements: service, solidarity, *ad extra* mission, witness of life, and holiness.

In the 1980 pastoral letter, the concept of service is rendered by the Sino-Vietnamese term “phục vụ” which means either “to serve” or “service.” This term appears eleven times in the text, expounding now one, now some other aspect of the mission of the people of God in Vietnam. It is used either as a direct or indirect verb in ten occurrences (nos. 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13), and once as a noun (no. 10). As a verb, four times it is preceded by the preposition “để” which means “in order to” (nos. 4, 7, 9, and 13), suggesting a teleological focus; and seven times it commands a direct object (nos. 10, 12, 13, and 14) to highlight the recipients of the Church's action. For the Vietnamese bishops, “phục vụ” is a more complex kind of concept than appears at first sight. It is a concrete expression of the mode of engagement and dialogue of the Church with the society of Vietnam. As an essentially anthropological and Christocentric theme, it also displays the theological features that are central to the theology of Vatican II, in particular its masterpiece *Gaudium et Spes*.

For the VEC, the duty of the Church is to continue the mission of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve every person.<sup>123</sup> Following John Paul II's declaration in his first encyclical—the human person is the way for the Church—<sup>124</sup> the bishops of Vietnam emphasise the centrality of the human person as the meeting point between the Church and the world.<sup>125</sup> Recalling section 21 of *Gaudium et Spes*, which deals with the attitude of the Church towards atheism, they insist that all people, “those believe as well as those do not, should help to establish right order in this world where

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<sup>123</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 7.

<sup>124</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 14 (Melbourne: A.C.T.S. Publications, 1979) 25.

<sup>125</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 7.

all live together.”<sup>126</sup> For them, the people of Vietnam are the community that God has entrusted to the Christian faithful to serve in their dual capacity as citizens and members of the Church.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, the object of the Church’s service is not only God and the Church, but also fellow human beings and the country.<sup>128</sup> This service, illuminated by the Gospel and animated by universal charity,<sup>129</sup> has as its objective the happiness of the people.<sup>130</sup> But in addition to the common materialistic understanding of the term happiness, the VEC expands the meaning of this concept by giving it an encompassing religious sense, and placing it in an eschatological context of new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1),<sup>131</sup> thereby implicitly referring to the Beatitudes.

By choosing the concept of service as the pivotal idea of the present letter, the VEC’s theology proposed in the 1980 pastoral letter coheres with the teaching of Vatican II and the Christological anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*. Indeed, in his closing speech at the fourth session of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI declares that all the doctrinal wealth of the Council aims at just one thing: to serve people, and this means everybody, whatever their misery and needs.<sup>132</sup> He goes on to affirm that the idea of service has occupied a central place in the Council, and that the Catholic religion is for humanity and in a certain sense it is humanity’s life.<sup>133</sup> By stressing that the ultimate beneficiary of the Church’s service is the whole Vietnamese people, that is, the human community in its concrete, existential, and historical circumstances, the VEC has effectively applied the social doctrines of *Gaudium et Spes*, and followed its approach

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<sup>126</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 21.

<sup>127</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 9.

<sup>128</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, nos. 13 and 10.

<sup>129</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 10.

<sup>130</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 14.

<sup>131</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 11.

<sup>132</sup> The original text in Latin reads: “huiusmodi divitem doctrinae copiam eo unice spectare, ut homini serviat, in omnibus eius vitae adjunctis, in omni eius infirmitate, et in omni eius necessitate.” See Paul VI, “*Homilia*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 57.

<sup>133</sup> From the sentences in Latin which read, respectively: “immo vero ministerii exercendi propositum reapse praecipuum obtinuit locum,” and “religionem scilicet catholicam pro humano esse, humanique generis esse quodammodo vitam.” Ibid, 57, 58.



of dialogue and engagement with the world. This Pastoral Constitution affirms the unity of the orders of creation and redemption in the history of salvation.<sup>134</sup> Its starting point is an anthropology that is essentially grounded in Christology,<sup>135</sup> succinctly summarised in the words of no. 22: “In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.”<sup>136</sup> This Christological anthropology became the basis of the Vietnamese bishops’ engagement and dialogue with the Communist society of Vietnam.

Indeed, by employing the notion of service of the people as a concrete expression of the engagement with the Communist-dominated society of Vietnam, the Catholic Church has effectively suggested a new mode of ecclesial and communal living for the Church in this country. It gave expression to a formal structure of dialogue,<sup>137</sup> which now included a willingness to engage in a sincere dialogue with the Communist Government despite the large measure of control imposed on the *ad intra* operations of the Church—such as the selection of candidates to the priesthood, and the appointment and movement of the clergy—and the restriction of the Church’s *ad extra* activities, even in the charitable and educational domains. This openness to dialogue with the Government is inspired by the vision of the Second Vatican Council and stems from the insights of Paul VI’s encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* and John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*.<sup>138</sup> It is somewhat akin to the *Ostpolitik* initiative

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<sup>134</sup> Walter Kasper, “The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Communio* 23 (Spring 1996) 137.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-7.

<sup>136</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

<sup>137</sup> Yves M.J. Congar observes that with Vatican II the Church has decidedly entered into a formal structure of dialogue. See “The Council in the Age of Dialogue,” translated by Barry N. Rigney, *Cross Currents* 12:2 (Spring 1962) 151. For an careful study of the concept of dialogue in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, see Ann Michele Nolan, *A Privileged Moment: Dialogue in the Language of the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965*, European University Studies Series, no. 23, Theology, vol. 829 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006). In this book, the author notes that the term dialogue translates two different Latin words, *dialogus* and *colloquium*, which do not mean the same thing, and argues that the two meanings of dialogue—one leading to an end-point and the other as an open-ended process between equals—become blurred in the conciliar documents. *Ibid.*, 175-6.

<sup>138</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite notes that the contribution of Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam* was “a shift from a world-denying to a world-affirming attitude” (*Pope Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* [London: HarperCollins, 1993] 380). At the time of its release in August 1964, the Pope recognised that dialogue with Communist political regimes was “very difficult, not to say impossible,” but asserted that “for the lover of truth discussion is always possible.” See *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 102. It was, writes

in the 1960s when the Vatican sought to negotiate agreements with Communist Governments in Eastern Europe to protect the survival of the Catholic Church in these countries.<sup>139</sup> It can be termed a “paradigm shift” in the pastoral theology of the VEC, in contrast to the former confrontational approach deriving from the teachings of Popes Pius XI and Pius XII. Indeed, back in 1951, the common letter of the Catholic Bishops of Indochina,<sup>140</sup> that is, besides the nuncio,<sup>141</sup> the nine prelates and three diocesan representatives from the Church in Vietnam, and one from the Church in Cambodia,<sup>142</sup> was an outright condemnation of Communism and its tactics. This two-page letter opens with a warning to Vietnamese Catholics on the grave danger of the atheistic ideology, and recalls a Vatican degree released on 1 July 1949 under the authority of Pope Pius XII that forbids Catholics to join the Communist Party or collaborate with them in setting up a Communist state.<sup>143</sup>

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Hebblethwaite, “a case of *spes contra spem*,” “a policy of patience, designed for the long haul.” Peter Hebblethwaite, *ibid.*, 381.

<sup>139</sup> Gregory Baum, “The Impact of Marxist Ideas on Christian Theology,” in *Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, edited by Gregory Baum (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999) 173. J. Joblin notes for John Paul II, religious freedom is the most fundamental of all human rights, and under his pontificate, “la politique de l’Eglise avec les régimes marxistes-léninistes est nettement orientée vers l’élargissement des espaces de liberté” (“Jean-Paul II and les socialismes: L’arrière-plan de l’éthique de la décision [Part 1],” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 108:1 (1986) 58, 60). Joblin goes on to conclude that “les relations de Jean Paul II avec les communismes est faite de fermeté et a souplesse,” [a position that we characterised in Chapter 8 as a *fortiter* and *suaviter* approach, and one that the Pope likely adopted to deal with the thorny issue of interreligious dialogue]. See Joblin, J. “Jean-Paul II and les socialismes: L’arrière-plan de l’éthique de la décision [Part 2],” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 108:2 (1986) 248.

<sup>140</sup> “Thư Chung Các Giám Mục Đông Dương” [Common Letter of the Bishops of Indochina], in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 93-5.

<sup>141</sup> Pope Paul VI explained the first of the five duties of the pontifical representatives (nuncios or papal ambassadors) as follows: “The primary and specific purpose of the mission of the Pontifical Representatives is to render even closer and more operative the ties that bind the Apostolic See and the local Church.” Quoted by Pedro Ramet in “Catholic Tradition, Hierarchy, and the Politics of Coexistence Under Communism: An Introduction,” in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, edited by Pedro Ramet, Christianity Under Stress, vol. 2 (London: Duke University Press, 1990) 23.

<sup>142</sup> Five of the ten bishops of the Catholic Church in Vietnam were Vietnamese and the rest being foreign missionaries.

<sup>143</sup> “Thư Chung Các Giám Mục Đông Dương” [Common Letter of the Bishops of Indochina], in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 93.

Nine years later, on the Ash Wednesday of 1960, at the height of the cold war and amid all that period's ideological *Sturm und Drang*, the bishops of South Vietnam issued another pastoral letter dealing with Communism.<sup>144</sup> It continued the general thrust of the 1951 communication and reiterated the injunction of the 1949 Degree that forbids Catholics to join the Communist Party under the pain of automatic excommunication.<sup>145</sup> It also retrieved the teaching of Pius XI's encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* to explain the theory and practice of Communism,<sup>146</sup> and Pius XII's encyclical *Ad Apostolorum Principis Sepulchrum*, in order to condemn *inter alia* the illicit ordination of bishops, the creation of Party-controlled Catholic Patriotic Associations, and the imposition of "three autonomies" on local Churches.<sup>147</sup> This "three-autonomies" policy of the Communist Government was often referred to as the Three-Self Movements. It stipulates that the Church should be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. However, one should not read into this principle a statement of support for the rightful autonomy of a local Church with regard to the universal Church.<sup>148</sup> Rather, it is a political scheme designed to sever the links between a local Church and the Holy See, so as to end the so-called foreign and papal interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country.<sup>149</sup> Introduced in China in

<sup>144</sup> See "Thư Chung về vấn đề Cộng sản vô thần của các Đức Giám Mục Miền Nam, Mùa Chay, 02-03-1960" [Common Letter on the Question of Atheistic Communism of the South Vietnamese Bishops, Lent, 2 March 1960], in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 125-38.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 134-5.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 126-7; for more details see nos. 8-24 of Pius XI, "*Divini Redemptoris*: Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Atheistic Communism March 19, 1937," in *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, edited by Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, [N.C.]: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981) 537-42.

<sup>147</sup> "Thư Chung về vấn đề Cộng sản vô thần của các Đức Giám Mục Miền Nam, Mùa Chay, 02-03-1960" [Common Letter on the Question of Atheistic Communism of the South Vietnamese Bishops, Lent, 2 March 1960], in *Hàng Giáo Phẩm Công Giáo Việt Nam (1960-1995)* [The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1960-1995)], 134-5; for further details see nos. 7, 8 and 38-41 of Pius XII, "*Ad Apostolorum Principis*: Encyclical of Pope XII on Communism and the Church in China, June 29, 1958," in *The Papal Encyclicals 1939-1958*, edited by Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, [N.C.]: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981) 366, 369.

<sup>148</sup> John Tong notes that "when the Communists had come to power in 1949, there were about 35 Chinese bishops out of the 146 bishops or monsignors throughout the country." See "The Church from 1949 to 1990," in *The Catholic Church in Modern China: Perspectives*, edited by Edmond Tang and Jean-Paul Wiest (New York: Orbis Books, 1993) 9. Their interpretation of "the Three Autonomies was not acceptable to the Communists." Ibid., 10.

<sup>149</sup> To date there is no evidence that the Vietnamese Government has been able, or willing, to grasp the nature of what it refers to as the "Vatican," or to make the distinction between the Holy See as a religious authority whose realm is purely spiritual, and the Vatican as an independent state that has a

the 1950s, the policy of three-autonomies was a strategy of the Chinese Communist Party to channel all religions into the mainstream and to put them under governmental control and supervision. This strategy has since become one of the guiding principles governing the officially-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Church which operates without the cooperation of the “underground” Catholics who loyally maintain their ties with the Holy See.<sup>150</sup>

Following the Chinese model, the Vietnamese Government established the national Catholic Patriotic Association as a member organisation of the Patriotic Front in November 1983 with the purported objective being to mobilise Catholics to

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role to play in the world of international diplomacy. Given its oft-repeated criticisms of the “Vatican interference” whenever the Pope appointed a bishop or an apostolic administrator without prior consultation with the Vietnamese authority, it seems likely that the Government, which does not brook any foreign “interference,” either deliberately ignores this distinction or prefers to see the Vatican solely as a political entity and a political power rather than the spiritual centre of the Catholic Church. For instance, in 1994, Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet lamented that the Holy See had nominated an administrator for the Archdiocese of Hochiminh City without prior discussion with the Government. In his view, the Holy See must follow the diplomatic protocols and discuss with the Government before nominating the bishops, and the Government can accept or decline their nominations based on its political criteria. See Eglises d’Asie, “Entretien de M. Vo Van Kiet, chef du gouvernement, sur un certain nombre de questions touchant le catholicisme,” *Eglises d’Asie* 173 (16 March 1994), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006). This report appeared earlier in the weekly *Công Giáo và Dân Tộc* [Catholicism and Nation] (27 February 1994). By 2007, “Vietnam, China and Saudi Arabia are among the few without formal links” with the Holy See. See The Economist, “God’s Ambassadors,” *The Economist* (21 July 2007) 58. It is noteworthy that “compared with many foreign services, the Holy See’s is tiny, less than 300-strong.” Ibid., 59. Under Pope John Paul II, “the Holy See increased the number of countries where it has diplomatic representation from 85 to 174.” See The Economist, “In God’s Name: a Special Report on Religion and Public Life,” *The Economist* (3 November 2007) 17. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio to the United Nations, explains three dimensions of the presence of the Church on national and international scene as working “on the international scene from a religious and moral perspective,” promoting global solidarity, and supporting humanitarian projects. See “How the Holy See Works on the International Scene,” *Origins* 34:29 (6 January 2005) 469, 471, and 472 respectively. He notes that “the Holy See became a permanent observer at the World Trade Organization.” Ibid., 471.

<sup>150</sup> In 1957, the Chinese Communist Party established the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association as the highest Catholic organisation in China. While being not the Church, this association has often acted as the mouthpiece of the Catholic Church in China. See John B. Zhang Shijiang, “Toward a Wider Reconciliation: A Cultural-Theological Reflection on the Division Within the Church in China,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 34:1-2 (1997) 152. In 1980, the official Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference (CCBC) was set up under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party. Ibid. Twelve years later, the parallel underground CCBC was founded without the approval of the Communist government. Ibid.; Eriberto P. Lozada, “Catholicism,” in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, edited by Edward L. Davis (London: Routledge, 2005) 68; see also Alfons Eppink, “A Seed Growing Secretly in China’s Soil,” *The Tablet* (26 October 1996) 1394. Pedro Ramet notes that only in China did the *divide et impera* bear fruit: “There, under pressure from the government, five of the twenty-eight bishops joined the government-sponsored Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and agreed to administer a church cut off from contact with Rome.” See “Catholic Tradition, Hierarchy, and the Politics of Coexistence Under Communism: An Introduction,” in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, edited by Pedro Ramet, Christianity Under Stress, vol. 2 (London: Duke University Press, 1990) 18-9.

participate with all the people in building and defending the country and the peace.<sup>151</sup> In October 1990 its name was changed to the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics and a new objective was added to the first article: “To look after the interests of the spiritual and material lives of Catholics, and make known the hopes of the faithful to the state so that they may be legitimately satisfied.”<sup>152</sup> It is noteworthy that in the early 1980s the VEC did not reach a common agreement on the nature and purpose of the Catholic Patriotic Association. Thus, in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, a Liaison Committee of Patriotic Catholics, the precursor to the local Catholic Patriotic Association, was established in January 1980 with the express support from Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình.<sup>153</sup> However, in 1983, Archbishop Nguyễn Kim Điền of Huế Archdiocese opposed the establishment of the Catholic Patriotic Association based on a declaration of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy.<sup>154</sup> In his view, this association is “an instrument of the state to control and divide the Church.”<sup>155</sup> The following year “he was subjected to 50 days of

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<sup>151</sup> See the background information note to Cardinal Angelo Sodano’s letter, “Priests and the ‘Catholic Patriotic Association’: Excerpt from Cardinal Angelo Sodano’s Letter to Bishop Paul-Marie Nguyen Minh Nhat, President of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference,” *Catholic International* 4:2 (February 1993) 7; see also endnote no. 5 in *Eglises d’Asie*, “Après vingt années d’attente: Une interview de Mgr Paul Nguyen Van Binh [Archbishop of Saigon],” *Eglises d’Asie* 199 (16 May 1995), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006). For further elaboration of the role of the Patriotic Front and its members organisations, see Article 7 of the “Ordonnance sur la croyance et la religion du Bureau permanent de l’Assemblée nationale: No. 21/2004/1+pl-ubtvqh11, le 18 juin 2004,” *Eglises d’Asie* 401 (16 July 2004) 31.

<sup>152</sup> See the background information note to Cardinal Angelo Sodano’s letter, “Priests and the ‘Catholic Patriotic Association’: Excerpt from Cardinal Angelo Sodano’s Letter to Bishop Paul-Marie Nguyen Minh Nhat, President of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference,” *Catholic International* 4:2 (February 1993) 7.

<sup>153</sup> *Eglises d’Asie*, “Après vingt années d’attente: Une interview de Mgr Paul Nguyen Van Binh [Archbishop of Saigon],” *Eglises d’Asie* 199 (16 May 1995), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006).

<sup>154</sup> Jean Maïs, “1975-1985: 10 ans de relations entre l’Église et l’état au Vietnam,” *Echange France-Asie* (May 1986) 24-5; see also The Vatican’s Clergy Congregation, “The Vatican’s Clergy Congregation’s Declaration on Associations of Priests, Politics and Labor,” *Origins* 11:4 (25 March 1982) 645, 647. For more details on the Archbishop’s “fortright defense of human rights and religious freedom in Vietnam,” see Stephen Denney, “The Catholic Church in Vietnam,” in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, edited by Pedro Ramet, Christianity Under Stress, vol. 2 (London: Duke University Press, 1990) 286-90.

<sup>155</sup> See the background information note to Cardinal Angelo Sodano, “Priests and the ‘Catholic Patriotic Association’: Excerpt from Cardinal Angelo Sodano’s Letter to Bishop Paul-Marie Nguyen Minh Nhat, President of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference,” *Catholic International* 4:2 (February 1993) 7. In a similar vein, in a recent ground-breaking letter to Chinese Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI blames the entities controlled by the Communist government in China for sowing “division both among the clergy and among the lay faithful,” and asserts that “the declared purpose of these entities to implement ‘the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic

interrogation during which he was told that the application of the Roman declaration in Vietnam was a violation of the law, and that ‘to oppose the Catholic Patriotic Association is to oppose the state’.<sup>156</sup> Except this rare case of policy rift between these two prominent members of the hierarchy, the VEC has since always presented a unified public view on ecclesial matters. In fact, according to Bishop Nguyễn Minh Nhật of Xuân Lộc diocese, President of the VEC in 1990, the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference has become an effective instrument in the service of individual dioceses and a body of coordination and unification.<sup>157</sup> He also notes that, in reality, the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics has had very few activities in the provinces except in Ho Chi Minh City where it has been quite active.<sup>158</sup> Unlike other religious groups, and quasi-governmental organisations in the country such as the Vietnam Women’s Union, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the National Peasants’ Union, and the Vietnam Confederation of Workers, the Church in Vietnam has never been a member of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, an operational instrument of the party for mobilising public opinion to support party policies and to provide the party with an accurate assessment of moods and attitudes among these key social

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administration of the church’ is incompatible with Catholic doctrine, which from the time of the ancient creeds professes to be ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’.” See Benedict XVI, “Letter to Chinese Catholics,” *Origins* 37:10 (2 August 2007) 150-1. This Letter was also published as “Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China,” [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_china\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html) (accessed 12 July 2007). The Pope went on to declare that “the present college of Catholic bishops of China cannot be recognized as an episcopal conference by the Apostolic See.” Ibid., 153.

<sup>156</sup> See Cardinal Angelo Sodano, “Priests and the ‘Catholic Patriotic Association’: Excerpt from Cardinal Angelo Sodano’s Letter to Bishop Paul-Marie Nguyen Minh Nhat, President of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference,” *Catholic International* 4:2 (February 1993) 7. In November 1986 Archbishop Nguyễn Kim Điền was subjected to more interrogations, and in 1988 he was allowed to go to Ho Chi Minh City for medical treatment where he passed away on 8 June the same year. See Missi, “Une Eglise sous haute surveillance: Les difficiles rapports entre l’Etat communiste et les catholiques,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 18. David G. Marr observes that “practically speaking, the issue of religion versus communism is more institutional than philosophical. The Communist Party of Vietnam wants a monopoly of power at all levels of society. Hence religious organizations must be infiltrated, circumscribed and controlled—if not necessarily eliminated—in the same manner as political, economic or ethnic organizations” (David G. Marr, “Church and State in Vietnam,” *Indochina Issues* 74 [April 1987] 3). The Economist notes that “the Vietnamese legal system is based mainly on Napoleonic principles but with bits adapted from the Chinese and Soviet models” (“Special Report on Vietnam: Half-way from Rags to Riches,” *The Economist* [26 April 2008] 5, after page 54).

<sup>157</sup> Eglises d’Asie, “Fidélité et Espérance: Une interview de Mgr Nguyễn Minh Nhật, évêque de Xuân Lộc, président de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam,” *Eglises d’Asie* 101 (16 December 1990), <http://www.eglasiemepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006).

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

groups,<sup>159</sup> even though some diocesan priests participated in its activities.<sup>160</sup> So, unlike the divided Church in China, the Church in Vietnam has been spared this intra-ecclesial division. This is due largely to the unity of the bishops and their loyalty to the Pope, a strong *sensus fidelium*, the vigilant support of the Vietnamese Catholic communities in the diaspora, and in particular, the foresight of the architects of the 1980 common letter. The bishops had in fact advocated a *modus vivendi* that was acceptable to both the faithful and the Government.

While the 1951 and 1960 pastoral letters described the official position of the Vietnamese Church towards Communism at that time, anti-Communist sentiments, expressed by clergy such as J.M. Thích, a diocesan priest, already existed well before the creation of the Vietnamese Communist Party.<sup>161</sup> These views were to be altered with the advent of Vatican II,<sup>162</sup> the Council that seeks to engage in dialogue rather

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<sup>159</sup> For more details on the Fatherland Front, in the context of Vietnam's political institutions, see Peter Nguyen Van Hai, "Recent Administrative Reform in Vietnam" (M. Public Admin. Thesis, University of Canberra, 1994) 4-5, 11. The author notes that the Communist Party of Vietnam "controls the mass organisations by placing party elites in the key positions within the executive committees of each mass organisation," in conformance with its official slogan "the party leads, the state administers, and the people exercise collective mastery." Ibid., 11; see also Peter N.V. Hai, "Recent Public Service Reform in Vietnam," in *Infrastructural Development and Legal Change in Vietnam*, edited by Graham Hassall and Truong Truong (Melbourne: Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies, The University of Melbourne, 1994) 129-30.

<sup>160</sup> Writing on the occasion of the National Congress of the Fatherland Front held in Hanoi from 26 to 28 August 1999, Huong Khe bemoaned the fact that the fifteen priests attending this Congress—seven from North Vietnam and eight from the South—did not represent the Catholic Church nor the hierarchy. See "Pourquoi l'Eglise catholique n'est-elle pas membre du Front patriotique du Vietnam?" *Eglises d'Asie* 298 (1 December 1999). <http://www.eglise.mepasie.org> (accessed 8 December 2006). Earlier in a speech to the VEC in 1997, the head of the Government Commission on Religious Affairs also complained that the bishops did not encourage their priests to join the Union of Catholic Solidarity (an organisation belonging to the Fatherland Front). See Lê Quang Vinh, "Bài nói chuyện của Trưởng ban tôn giáo Chính phủ (08-10-1997) [Address by the Head of Government Commission on Religious Affairs (8 October 1997)]," in *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)* [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (1980-2000)], 522-9.

<sup>161</sup> See for example, J.M. Thích, *Vấn Đề Cộng Sản* [The Question of Communism], (Qui Nhon: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 1927), cited by David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1981) 85-6. The current name of the party that runs Vietnam is "Vietnamese Communist Party." It was chosen in December 1976 to replace the previous name "Vietnamese Workers' Party," a name that was adopted in 1951 and originated from the "Indochinese Communist Party" which was founded under the leadership of Hồ Chí Minh in 1930. See Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006) 412.

<sup>162</sup> For J. Bryan Hehir, the post-conciliar shift in Catholicism on Church-State relations "is rooted in two ecclesiological moves at Vatican II": "the ecclesiological legitimation of social ministry" and "the conciliar and post-conciliar legitimation of the local church as a social actor" ("Church-State and Church-World: The Ecclesiological Implications," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 41 [1986] 55).



than condemnation,<sup>163</sup> and makes a crucial distinction between Communism and its followers, while continuing to deplore the blatant violations of religious liberty and human rights.<sup>164</sup> To a certain extent, it softened the earlier anti-Communist stance of Pius XI and Pius XII, whose encyclicals were prompted largely by the horrible persecutions of Christians in several Communist countries during their pontificates.<sup>165</sup> This later change in ecclesiastical policy gradually fomented a Copernican revolution in the VEC's theology of the laity and of the Church. It culminated in the 1980 pastoral letter and its key expression, "living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of our compatriots."

The marked break of the Vietnamese Church with the past has also drawn on the teaching of Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam*, prominently quoted at the beginning of the main text of the 1980 pastoral letter, and thus effectively setting the tone for the rest of the statement. In this encyclical, the first of his pontificate, Paul VI reflects on the mission of the Church in the world, stressing that representatives of both spheres

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<sup>163</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* 80 is the unique text in which the Council employed the term "condemnation": "every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation."

<sup>164</sup> See for instance *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 21, a whole paragraph of which deserves to be quoted in full: "Although the Church altogether rejects atheism, she nevertheless sincerely proclaims that all men, those who believe as well those who do not, should help establish right order in this world where all live together. This certainly cannot be done without a dialogue that is sincere and prudent. The Church therefore deplores the discrimination between believers and unbelievers which some civil authorities unjustly practice in defiance of the fundamental rights of the human person. She demands effective freedom for the faithful to be allowed to build up God's temple in this world also. She courteously invites atheists to weigh the merits of the Gospel of Christ with an open mind."

<sup>165</sup> Pius XI mentioned Russia, Mexico, and Spain, and Pius XII's Encyclical was about the Church in China. See respectively Pius XI, "*Divini Redemptoris*: Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Atheistic Communism March 19, 1937," in *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, edited by Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, [N.C.]: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981) 538, and Pius XII, "*Ad Apostolorum Principis*: Encyclical of Pope XII on Communism and the Church in China, June 29, 1958," in *The Papal Encyclicals 1939-1958*, 365. In Ukraine and in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, "the Catholic Church suffered direct and violent persecution—in 1946 more than 500 priests of the Diocese of Lvov alone were in prison." See Eric D'Arcy, "Freedom of Religion," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 946. In China, "within the first decade after 1949, all but five of 2,500 Chinese Catholic priests had been executed or imprisoned, and systematic antireligious education had attained a perfection and effectiveness not previously known." Ibid. Looking back on the last century, George Weigel argues that "the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the most secular and the most bloody in human history," and that "the Godless religions of Nazism and communism killed tens of millions of people." See The Economist, "In God's Name: a Special Report on Religion and Public Life," *The Economist* (3 November 2007) 11.



“should meet together and get to know each other and love one another.”<sup>166</sup> The 1980 pastoral letter captures the three fundamental ideas of this encyclical, namely, the Church’s self-awareness, renewal, and dialogue.<sup>167</sup> For Paul VI, the Church, first of all, must “look with penetrating eyes within itself, ponder the mystery of its own being, and draws enlightenment and inspiration from a deeper scrutiny of the doctrine of its own origin, nature, mission, and destiny.”<sup>168</sup> Second, it must compare “the ideal image of the Church as Christ envisaged it, His holy and spotless bride, and the actual image which the Church presents to the world today,” so that such ecclesial self-awareness should inevitably lead to “the Church’s heroic and impatient struggle for renewal.”<sup>169</sup> These two attitudes give rise to the third, the relations between the Church and “the surrounding world in which it lives and works.”<sup>170</sup> Following Paul VI in this regard, the Vietnamese bishops propose that all members of the Vietnamese Church meditate on such attitudes every day.<sup>171</sup> Also like the Pope, who affirms that the task of the Church is to serve society,<sup>172</sup> the bishops highlight the concept of service as the mode of engagement with the society. In line with *Gaudium et Spes*,<sup>173</sup> they link the imperative of service with the notion of the Church’s solidarity with all humanity,<sup>174</sup> the second major theme of the 1980 pastoral letter that we propose to examine in the next section.

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<sup>166</sup> *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 3.

<sup>167</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 5; *Ecclesiam Suam*, nos. 9-14. Paul VI provides a summary of his encyclical under these three themes, which are also the chapter headings and the slogans of his pontificate. See Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: HarperCollins, 1993) 380.

<sup>168</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 5; *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 9.

<sup>169</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 5; *Ecclesiam Suam*, nos. 10-11.

<sup>170</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 5; *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 12.

<sup>171</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 5.

<sup>172</sup> Paul VI affirms that the task of the Church is to serve society. See *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 5.

<sup>173</sup> T. Howland Sanks argues that the “notion of a single world community, of human solidarity, pervades the document and is one of the most significant developments in the Church’s understanding of its social mission” (“The Social Mission of the Church: Its Changing Context,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honour of Patrick Granfield*, edited by Peter C. Phan [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000] 278).

<sup>174</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 3, 1.

Following *Gaudium et Spes* teaching that the Church “travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world,”<sup>175</sup> the Vietnamese bishops declare that the Church in Vietnam, living in the midst of the people and drawing on the tradition of the nation, is determined to embrace the destiny of the country and inserts itself into the very life of the land.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, all the faithful must journey with the people because this country is the place and the mother’s womb where they are called to live and to act as the children of God.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, the Vietnamese people are the community that the Lord has entrusted to them to serve in their capacity as citizens of the nation and members of the people of God.<sup>178</sup> This journey with the people and immersion in their daily life is expressed by two specific missions. The first is the Church’s active participation with the people of the whole country, so as to defend and to develop the nation. The second has to do with building up in the Church a lifestyle and an expression of faith that is consonant with the traditions of all the peoples in the country.<sup>179</sup> The first mission, which can be summarised in the theme of solidarity, deals with the *ad extra* aspect of the phrase “in the midst of the people.” The second which emphasises the need for inculturation, expounds the *ad intra* dimension of the text. In some significant way these two specific missions are already implied in the summary statement: “living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of our compatriots.” Together they clarify the overall mission of the Vietnamese faithful, including lay people, who represent the largest membership of the Church, in the concrete, existential, and historical circumstances of Vietnam.

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<sup>175</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40.

<sup>176</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 9.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Here we use “peoples” and “traditions” rather than “people” and “tradition” as there are in Vietnam at least fifty-four ethnic groups each of which has a different culture and language. See Đỗ Hữu Nghiêm, “Giáo hội và các đồng bào thiểu số ở Việt Nam” [Church and the Minorities in Vietnam], in *Tuyển tập: 40 năm thành lập hàng giáo phẩm công giáo Việt Nam 11/1960 – 11/2000* [Selections: 40 Years of the Establishment of the Vietnamese Catholic Hierarchy 11/1960 – 11/2000], compiled by Nguyễn Đăng Trúc (Reichstett, France: Định Hướng Tùng Thư, 2000) 58-60. This paper also appeared in *Định Hướng* 26 (2001) 100-54; see also Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-2003) [Brief History of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1533-2003)],” in *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 185.

It is noteworthy that in providing a theological rationale for the Church's journey and engagement with the people the VEC has dug deep into the cultural and linguistic traditions of the peoples to retrieve the four different terms already mentioned. Each denotes one aspect or another of Vietnamese life: namely, dân tộc, quê hương, đất nước, and tổ quốc. As discussed before, depending on the context of its occurrences, the term "dân tộc" can mean people, nation, or race. The term "quê hương," a juxtaposition of a Vietnamese word and a Sino-Vietnamese term, is usually translated as country or homeland, and conjures up an image of one's own native village in the countryside just as the Sino-Vietnamese term "hương" denotes village.<sup>180</sup> In one of the classic books which provides penetrating insights into Vietnamese character and society, John T. McAlister and Paul Mus note that "village life is the most fundamental expression of Vietnamese society."<sup>181</sup> The term "đất nước," which comprises two Vietnamese words that denote land and water respectively, is a cultural and historical term that underlines the importance of land and water in the life and sustenance of the ancestors of the Vietnamese peoples today. The term "tổ quốc" can be rendered as nation or homeland, and literally means the country of the forefathers because the term "tổ" means the forebears or the ancestors.<sup>182</sup> Used together in one paragraph, these four terms amplify the meaning of the deceptively simple phrase "in the midst of the people," a construct inspired by the documents of Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council.<sup>183</sup> They also refer to the peoples who have for centuries inhabited the land of Vietnam,<sup>184</sup> a country that they have built up to be one of the most resilient and fiercely independent nations in the world.

<sup>180</sup> Đào Duy Anh, *Hán Việt Từ Điển Giản Yếu* [Chinese Vietnamese Concise Dictionary], revised by Phan Bội Châu, ([Hà Nội]: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 1931), s.v. "hương," 362.

<sup>181</sup> McAlister, John T. and Paul Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 117. This book was based on Paul Mus' book *Việt-Nam: Sociologie d'une Guerre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), hence the appearance of their names as coauthors. In his foreword to the book, McAlister considers his former professor as "the most knowledgeable scholar in the world on Vietnam" in the 1950s. Ibid. ix.

<sup>182</sup> Đào Duy Anh, *Hán Việt Từ Điển Giản Yếu* [Chinese Vietnamese Concise Dictionary], revised by Phan Bội Châu, ([Hà Nội]: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 1931), s.v. "tổ quốc," 763.

<sup>183</sup> See for instance, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 21, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43, and *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

<sup>184</sup> The Vietnamese were traditionally known to have a passion for wet rice cultivation. See David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1971) 7; Trần Ngọc Thêm, *Tìm Về Bản Sắc văn hóa Việt Nam: Cái Nhìn Hệ Thống–Loại Hình* [Discovering the Identity of Vietnamese Culture: Typological–Systematic Views], 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh: Nhà Xuất Bản TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 2004) 63-8. According to Trần Ngọc Thêm, Vietnamese

In the first instance, this solidarity “in the midst of the people” is expressed by the patriotism of all the Vietnamese faithful. Following Vatican II’s Degree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, the bishops of Vietnam insist that, for the Church, the love of the country and the love of other people are not only a necessary natural sentiment but also a requirement of the Gospel.<sup>185</sup> In their view, love of country must be real, and this implies awareness of the current problems of the country, knowledge of the goals, policies, and laws of the Government, and willingness to cooperate with all people to defend and turn Vietnam into a rich, powerful, free, and happy country.<sup>186</sup> For its part, the Gospel will provide the inspiration and strength needed to overcome the difficulties and egoistic tendencies, and to promote a spirit of service and universal charity, in anticipation of a new heaven and earth, the ultimate object of Christian hope.<sup>187</sup>

These statements contain political overtones that require further explanations. First, the formulation of the first mission of the Vietnamese Church has to do with the patriotism of the bishops,<sup>188</sup> and their apprehension of the Government’s suspicion of Church activities. Second, by placing the mission of the faithful to defend and develop the country before their responsibility for inculturation of the Christian faith in the society of Vietnam, the bishops have given prominence to the *ad extra* aspect of the mission of the Church before its *ad intra* dimension, and thereby placing the duty of the faithful as citizens before their responsibility as members of the Church. Third, by encouraging the faithful to actively participate with the people of the whole

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cultures are different from the Chinese as the latter are based on an amalgamation of three distinct traditions: nomadic, dry, and wet agriculture. Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> According to *Ad Gentes* (no. 15), the faithful, as good citizens, “should sincerely and actively foster love of country.” VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 10.

<sup>186</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 10.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>188</sup> For example, Archbishop Paul Nguyễn Văn Bình attended the formal ceremony to inaugurate the construction of the defence lines at Hóc Môn, a district on the outskirts of Hồ Chí Minh City, and this symbolic act was praised by Võ Văn Kiệt, the then Prime Minister of Vietnam. See *Eglises d’Asie*, “Entretien de M. Vo Van Kiet, chef du gouvernement, sur un certain nombre de questions touchant le catholicisme,” *Eglises d’Asie* 173 (16 March 1994), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006). This communication also appeared in the weekly *Công Giáo và Dân Tộc* [Catholicism and Nation] (27 February 1994).

country for the defence and development of the nation, the VEC is obviously referring to the political and social situation of Vietnam around 1980. Indeed, 1980 was a year when the country was still at war with two of his neighbouring countries, namely Kampuchea and China, and its economy was literally in ruins with the majority of people living in abject poverty.<sup>189</sup>

On Christmas Day 1978, Vietnam launched a huge dry season offensive against the Khmer Rouge regime in Kampuchea with the help of the small army of the Kampuchea National United Front for National Salvation (KNUFNS).<sup>190</sup> Within three weeks, it was claimed that this pro-Vietnamese front was in control of almost all of the country.<sup>191</sup> However, the Pol Pot forces of between 20,000 to 30,000 escaped the swift invasion and continued to harass the Vietnamese and the KNUFNS forces, forcing Vietnam to increase its troops in Kampuchea, by the end of 1979, “to an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 men.”<sup>192</sup> So, instead of an expected quick victory, Vietnam found itself “bogged down in a protracted, costly and frustrating pacification campaign in Kampuchea.”<sup>193</sup> The international reaction was very sharp,<sup>194</sup> and from 17 to 26 February 1979 Chinese troops invaded Vietnam penetrating some 25 miles

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<sup>189</sup> Douglas Pike, “Vietnam in 1980: The Gathering Storm?” *Asian Survey* 21:1 (January 1981) 84-5.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 21; Kay Möller, “China und Vietnam 1988-1992: Zurück zur Allianz?” *Asien* 47 (April 1993) 6; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 688; David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2008) 274.

<sup>191</sup> John C. Donnell, “Vietnam 1979: Year of Calamity,” *Asian Survey* 20:1 (January 1980) 21.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 31. Vietnam withdrew its troops from Kampuchea, nowadays known as Cambodia, in September 1989. See Nguyen Vu Tung, “Vietnam’s Membership of ASEAN: A Constructivist Interpretation,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29:3 (December 2007) 484. For Gary Klintworth, “the occupation of Cambodia was heavy millstone round the neck of Vietnam. From April 1977 until September 1989 Vietnam lost 55,000 dead and 60,000 wounded,” “about the same as the Vietnamese losses during the First Indochina War against the French and comparable with the 58,000 American dead in Vietnam [during the Second Indochina War].” See “Vietnam: Forces of Change,” in *Doi Moi: Vietnam’s Renovation: Policy and Performance*, edited by Dean Forbes et al. (Canberra: Australian National University, 1991) 216.

<sup>194</sup> Graham Alliband points out that “while Vietnam’s military action in Cambodia violated the United Nations charter, it cannot be denied that it did succeed in saving the Cambodian people from further depredation and maltreatment by the Khmer Rouge” (“Whither Vietnam?” In *Doi Moi: Vietnam’s Renovation: Policy and Performance*, edited by Dean Forbes et al. [Canberra: Australian National University, 1991] 235).

inside its border and entering the northern town of Lạng Sơn on 2 March.<sup>195</sup> On 5 March China announced that its troops were withdrawing after achieving its objectives,<sup>196</sup> and after “wreaking havoc on border region communities and the northern economic infrastructure.”<sup>197</sup> At the same time “Hanoi proclaimed a general mobilization of all men between 18 and 45 and women between 18 and 35 in the militia, guerrilla and self-defence forces.”<sup>198</sup> By 1980, Vietnam had the fourth largest standing army in the world totalling about 1.1 million. The resultant military spending took a heavy toll on the economy.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, partly as the result of these military operations, the economic situation in Vietnam in 1980 was extremely bleak: poverty steadily increased to the point where the population was threatened with malnutrition.<sup>200</sup> Per capita income was estimated at only \$US150 to \$200 per year.<sup>201</sup>

In addition to the political and economic factors that prompted the Vietnamese bishops to emphasise national defence and development as a specific mission of the faithful, their fear of the victorious Government was another reason. Even in 1995,

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<sup>195</sup> John C. Donnell, “Vietnam 1979: Year of Calamity,” *Asian Survey* 20:1 (January 1980) 23; Kay Möller, “China und Vietnam 1988-1992: Zurück zur Allianz?” *Asien* 47 (April 1993) 6.

<sup>196</sup> John C. Donnell, “Vietnam 1979: Year of Calamity,” *Asian Survey* 20:1 (January 1980) 23. For King C. Chen, “the 1979 war was an episode in the long history of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship and a revealing one in the pattern of their relations”: “when China was strong, friendly, and magnanimous, Vietnam paid tribute to, cooperated with and imitated China; when China was divided and chaotic, Vietnam enjoyed more independence and freedom; and when China was aggressive, Vietnam resisted.” See *China’s War with Vietnam, 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1987) xiii. Writing about the Sino-Vietnamese political history over the course of two thousand years, Brantly Womack argues that “the relationship of China and Vietnam is not one but two: the relationship of China to Vietnam and the relationship of Vietnam to China. These two sub-relationships are not simply the same game viewed from the perspective of one or the other player. Each player is playing a different game. Each interprets the behaviour of the other in terms of its own game. As a result each player is often surprised by the actions of the other, and each has a critical opinion of the other.” Quoted by Chan Yuk Wah, review of *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry*, by Brantly Womack, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38:3 (August 2008) 470; see also Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 9.

<sup>197</sup> John C. Donnell, “Vietnam 1979: Year of Calamity,” *Asian Survey* 20:1 (January 1980) 31.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>199</sup> Douglas Pike, “Vietnam in 1980: The Gathering Storm?” *Asian Survey* 21:1 (January 1981) 87.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 84. The Economist observes that “before starting *doi moi* market-oriented reforms in the mid-1980s, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam flirted with real communism and came close to famine.” See “Good Morning At Last,” *The Economist* (3 August 2006), [http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=7252940](http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=7252940) (accessed 17 July 2007).

<sup>201</sup> John C. Donnell, “Vietnam 1979: Year of Calamity,” *Asian Survey* 20:1 (January 1980) 30.

Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình of Hồ Chí Minh City frankly admitted that he still had a great fear of the Communists.<sup>202</sup> For him, there was a vast discrepancy between the Government's policies and the assurances of its high-ranking officials on the one hand, and, on the other, the confidential reports that he received from the clergy, the religious, and the laity.<sup>203</sup> As a result, the political situation was never far from apprehension and ambiguity.

We now turn to the second specific mission of inculturation. This issue has occupied the minds of the bishops since 20 October 1964 when the Holy See formally permitted the Vietnamese hierarchy to apply the instruction *Plane compertum est* (8 December 1939),<sup>204</sup> allowing for the observance of the traditional honours to Confucius and the veneration of ancestors and heroes,<sup>205</sup> and thus bringing to an

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<sup>202</sup> *Eglises d'Asie*, "Après vingt années d'attente: Une interview de Mgr Paul Nguyen Van Binh [Archbishop of Saigon]," *Eglises d'Asie* 199 (16 May 1995), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006).

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> For the full text of the instruction *Plane compertum est* (8 December 1939) see *100 Roman Documents Relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy (1645-1941)*, translations by Donald D. St. Sure, [and] edited by Ray R. Noll, (San Francisco: The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1992) 87-8. This *Propaganda Fide* instruction, approved by Pope Pius XII, dispenses all clergy from the obligation to take the oath of obedience to the papal decrees prescribed by Pope Benedict XIV's Constitution *Ex quo singulari* (5 July 1742). See *ibid.*, 60, 59 respectively. The reason for the Church's permission, explained in the first paragraph of the instruction *Plane compertum est* (8 December 1939), is that certain ceremonies which were seen in earlier times to be tied with pagan rites have with the passage of time preserved only their "civil expression of devotion toward ancestors, or of patriotism, or of respect for fellow countrymen." *Ibid.*, 87. But "this is a point that the Jesuit missionaries had been trying to make without success since the 1630's! A point that Kangxi Emperor had made in his decree of November 30, 1700, which in those days was viewed as governmental interference in the affairs of the Church!" See Ray R. Noll, "Introduction," *ibid.*, xvi. Liam Matthew Brockey concludes that by ruling in favour of "the interpretation of Confucian ceremonies as political rather than religious," "the papacy legitimated the standpoint of the early modern Jesuits, which had previously been condemned" (*Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007] 14).

<sup>205</sup> It is not clear why the VEC had to wait until 1964 to obtain permission from the Holy See to apply in the Church in Vietnam the instructions of *Plane compertum est* (8 December 1939). See La Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam, "Le culte des ancêtres et des héros: Communiqué de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam," *Documentation Catholique* 63 (1966) 467-70; Stephen Nguyen Nhu The [Archbishop of Huế], "Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002) 125. According to Peter C. Phan, "for nearly four centuries they [Vietnamese Catholics] were strictly forbidden to practice ancestor worship, the most sacred ritual of the Confucian tradition, which the church condemned as idolatry. The correspondence between the bishops of Vietnam and the Propaganda Fide (now the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) over those centuries contain repeated queries about the permissibility of venerating ancestors and of contributing money for the building of temples—queries to which the Propaganda Fide consistently replied with a firm, curt negative." See "Praying to the Buddha: Living Amid Religious Pluralism," *Commonweal* 134:2 (26

official end the Chinese Rites Controversy in four brief articles.<sup>206</sup> As the Church in Vietnam is slowly shedding its Western images, architectures, and practices for others more suited to Vietnamese cultures and mores, the challenge confronting the bishops is to promote a common expression of faith that is consonant with the traditions of the people,<sup>207</sup> a task that was of vital concern to the missionaries in the early years of the

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January 2007), <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE> (accessed 21 February 2006), Gale Document Number: A159183041; see also *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) 115-6; *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) 125-45; Peter De Ta Vo, "A Cultural and Theological Foundation for Ancestor Veneration among Catholics in Vietnam," Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1999.

<sup>206</sup> The interventions of the Vietnamese bishops at the 1998 Synod for Asia show that this issue continues to remain current and urgent, at least in the context of Vietnam. See, for instance, Stephen Nguyen Nhu The [Archbishop of Huế], "Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124-6; Paul Nguyen Van Hoa [Bishop of Nha Trang], "Evangelization in Vietnam," *ibid.*, 122-4; Roland Jacques, "Le dossier des rites Chinois doit-il être rouvert?" *L'année canonique* 41 (1999) 366. For an excellent summary of the decrees and edicts relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy, see George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985) 25-76. Minamiki notes that the making of the *Ex quo singulari* (5 July 1742) decision "had involved in the course of a century and a half seven popes and two apostolic delegates; two Chinese emperors and their courts; the kings of Portugal, Spain, and France; the Jesuit confessor of Louis XIV; the Holy Office and the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith; the theology faculty of the Sorbonne; the Jansenists; preachers like Fenelon and Bossuet; writers like Voltaire and Leibnitz; the missionaries, their congregations, and superiors. Most important of all, it touched the lives of the Chinese Christians and affected in an irrevocable way the course of the Church in the Middle Kingdom." *Ibid.*, ix-x. For him, this controversy "involved the whole field of cross-cultural understanding and missionary accommodation," as at issue were two problems: "the linguistic and semantic problem of how to designate in Chinese the divinity and other spiritual concepts, and secondly the problem of the ceremonies in honor of Confucius and the ancestors." *Ibid.*, ix, xii. For a succinct overview of the historical context and the theological issues surrounding the Chinese Rites Controversy see Peter C. Phan, "Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a test Case," *Worship* 76:5 (September 2002) 403-21.

<sup>207</sup> Speaking on behalf of the Church in Vietnam at Vatican II, two Vietnamese bishops made interesting interventions: Simon Hoà Nguyễn Văn Hiền of Đà Lạt diocese asked that 'episcopal conferences be permitted to introduce liturgical feasts on certain civil feast days to give them a Christian dimension and to show nonbelievers that Christians respect ancestral traditions,' and Paul Seitz of Kontum diocese reminded the Council Fathers that sacred art "was in the service of the liturgy of the people of God and ought to be marked by simplicity, integrity, and poverty." See *History of Vatican II. Vol. 2, The Formation of the Council's Identity: First Period and Intersession, October 1962-September 1963*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo, English version edited by Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2000) 144-6. In a brilliant essay on the controversy surrounding the Chinese Rites, Mark D. Luttio argues that Mateo Ricci (1552-1610), the Jesuits, Rome, and Western missionaries were "asking a Western question and pronouncing a Western judgment on an Eastern practice" by considering the issue merely as "a matter of determining the rite's fundamental character, whether it was civil or religious," with the Jesuits claiming civil/social and Rome ruling religious (namely, superstitious and pagan). See "The Chinese Rites Controversy (1603-1742): A Diachronic and Synchronic Approach," *Worship* 68 (4 July 1994) 313, 307-8. Luttio contends that they were all "wrong in failing to address the question from the perspective of the East, and wrong in failing to ask how the Chinese themselves (both those within and outside the Church) perceived the issue of the Confucian and ancestral rites" (*ibid.*, 313). For him, "the ancestral and Confucian rituals have functioned through time, and continue to do so, as a means for shaping and holding together the basic Chinese social fabric. The ritual itself likely draws on elements both from the secular and religious



establishment of the Church. As it has often been raised by the Vietnamese bishops, in particular at the 1998 Synod for Asia,<sup>208</sup> and treated in detail by numerous authors, mainly in the Vietnamese language,<sup>209</sup> we will not rehearse the whole question here, but only offer observations on some of its more important challenges.

First, for Trần Văn Toàn, an Emeritus Professor of Lille University, there was no evidence to support a prevailing view that the early European missionaries had sought to destroy the Vietnamese culture when they romanised the Vietnamese language.<sup>210</sup> He supports his argument by two observations. First, unlike Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism,<sup>211</sup> which were introduced into Vietnam through the Chinese language and the Chinese writings,<sup>212</sup> Christianity was preached by the missionaries in *chữ*

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world, two worlds which are usually kept distinct in the West, but which in the East coalesce in the ritual act.” Ibid., 311. Peter C. Phan makes a similar remark in the context of Vietnam: “whatever may be said about the advantages of the decisions of *Plane compertum est* for missionary work and about the correctness of the Jesuits’ judgment on the nature of ancestor worship from the point of view of the intellectual elite, there is no denying that for the great masses, ancestor worship is a *religious* act, indeed, the most religious act of their religion” (Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 28). His view echoes an earlier observation by Léopold Cadière who observed that “pour l’immense majorité des Annamites, les Ancêtres continuent à faire partie de la famille, et le culte qu’on a pour eux est nettement religieux.” See his classic work *Croyances et Pratiques Religieuses des Annamites*, [volume 1], (Paris: Ecole Française D’Extrême-Orient, 1944) 41. Speaking at the Asian Synod in 1998, Archbishop Nguyen Nhu The affirmed that “most Vietnamese pray *to* their ancestors in their family life” (emphasis added). See “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 125. It is noteworthy that in his memoirs published in 1650, de Rhodes gave an accurate description of the cult of ancestors in Vietnam: “there is perhaps no other nation in this inhabited earth that honors and venerates the souls and bodies of the dead more than the people of Tonkin.” See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 93.

<sup>208</sup> At the Asian Synod in 1998, the Vietnamese bishops called for a greater inculturation of Christian beliefs and practices in ways more understandable and acceptable to the Vietnamese people. See Stephen Nguyen Nhu The [Archbishop of Huế], “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124-6; Paul Nguyen Van Hoa [Bishop of Nha Trang], “Evangelization in Vietnam,” *ibid.*, 122-4.

<sup>209</sup> The most articulate of them is no doubt Peter C. Phan, who has written several papers dealing with various aspects of the subject. See relevant chapters in his two magisterial works, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) and *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003).

<sup>210</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, “La doctrine des ‘trois pères’: Un effort d’inculturation du christianisme au Vietnam,” *Mission* 9:1 (2002) 89-104.

<sup>211</sup> For an excellent overview of the history and basic tenets of these three religions, see Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 13-24. We also concur with the author that Confucianism is “more an ethico-political system than a religion, and in this respect that its influence on the Vietnamese culture is pervasive and enduring.” See *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>212</sup> Today most scholars concur that Buddhist monks accompanying Indian merchants first introduced Buddhism into Vietnam towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. However its real development began only

*nôm*,<sup>213</sup> the Vietnamese national writing system at that time.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, if the missionaries had romanised the Vietnamese language they did so in order to facilitate their learning of the Vietnamese language.<sup>215</sup> This Latin-based writing system would be used mainly by the missionaries and Vietnamese Catholics together with the *chữ nôm*, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the romanised form became the official writing system of Vietnam.<sup>216</sup> The author concluded that the early European missionaries had seriously endeavoured to inculturate Christianity in the traditions of Vietnam rather than destroy its cultures.

Trần Văn Toàn's second thesis is a cogent argument against a popular view that in Vietnam, Christianity suffered from a lack of inculturation and consequently remained a foreign religion in the early years of evangelisation.<sup>217</sup> In his view, when

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from the 6<sup>th</sup> century when the Buddhist missionaries arrived from China. See Nguyễn Tạng, "Giáo Hội Phật Giáo" [The Buddhist Church], in Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference], *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005*, 492-6.

<sup>213</sup> According to Brian Eugene Ostrowski, "it was in *Nôm*, rather than romanized Vietnamese, that most Christian liturgical, scriptural, and doctrinal documents circulated in early modern Vietnam." See "The *Nôm* Works of Geronimo Maiorica, S.J. (1589-1656) and their Christology," Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2006, xii. The author also notes that this Napolese missionary served "four years in Cochinchina and nearly twenty-five in Tonkin," and "authored forty-eight volumes of religious literature" in *Nôm* script, and "some thirty volumes survive today." Ibid., xii-xiii, 1. For a succinct description of the *Nôm* writing system, see Nguyễn Đình Hoà, "Chữ *Nôm*: The Demotic System of Writing in Vietnam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79:4 (Oct-Dec 1959) 270-4. *Chữ nôm* was an "adaptation of Chinese written characters used in a written form of the Vietnamese language in traditional Vietnam" (Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition [Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006] 72). While its origins are obscure it "probably came into use by the late eighth or early ninth centuries, ... and was devised to provide a way to transcribe spoken Vietnamese, particularly for non-Chinese forms of poetry and other vernacular literature." Ibid. "The character *nôm* itself combined the Chinese characters for 'south' and 'mouth'." Ibid.; see also Trinh Khắc Mạnh, "Nom Script: A National Cultural Heritage," *Vietnam Social Sciences* 3 (2006) 87-94, and Peter C. Phan, "Religious Plurality in East Asia Before 1800: The Encounter Between Christianity and Asian Religions," endnote 70, <http://www.dunglac.net/phandinhcho/plurality.htm> (accessed 4 January 2006) 49.

<sup>214</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>215</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 90. Peter C. Phan notes that, in 1620, the Jesuits in Vietnam prepared a catechism in *chữ nôm* with the collaboration of Vietnamese converts, and "it is likely that the text was written in *chu nom* for the use of the Vietnamese, whereas the foreign missionaries had it written in Roman alphabet for their use." See *Mission and Catechesis*, 31.

<sup>216</sup> According to Peter C. Phan, "the Romanisation of the Vietnamese language, facilitated by the European printing system, remained for two centuries [from mid-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth century] a script used almost exclusively by and for Christians." See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 34. As we mentioned earlier, in 1917, it became the official language used in civil service examinations held in Vietnam. See *ibid.*, 34.

<sup>217</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 91.

Christianity was introduced into the country towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Confucianism had already become the doctrine of the state while Buddhism and Taoism were in decline.<sup>218</sup> Therefore, instead of having to engage in dialogue with all three religions,<sup>219</sup> the early missionaries had to deal mainly with Confucianism. This ethical and political traditional worldview has as its basic principles the three social relationships or bonds (*tam cương*) and the five common virtues or relations (*ngũ thường*).<sup>220</sup> These bonds are “between king and subject, between husband and wife, and between parents and children.”<sup>221</sup> The five virtues or constants include *nhân* (benevolence, compassion, goodness, humanity) as the central virtue, *ngĩa* (justice, goodness), *lễ* (civility, ethical behaviour), *trí* (wisdom, cleverness), and *tín* (faithfulness, reliability). Realising that Christianity has two tenets that were not acceptable to the followers of Confucianism at that time, namely monogamy and the

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<sup>218</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 92. Nguyễn Thế Anh argues that “until the fifteenth century, Vietnam was essentially a Buddhist country,” and “not until Lê Thánh-tông’s reign (1460-97) did Confucian orthodoxy in state ideology reach full bloom” (“From Indra to Maitreya: Buddhist Influence in Vietnamese Political Thought,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 33:2 [June 2002] 225, 235). Following Léopold Cadière, Peter C. Phan notes that “when the three foreign religions came to Vietnam, they did not of course enter into a religious vacuum,” and that there was already an indigenous religion, which is now often “referred to as animism, or the cult of spirits.” See *Mission and Catechesis*, 24, 92; *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) 132. This cult of the spirits is “the original religion of the Vietnamese into which elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism were amalgamated.” *Ibid.*; see also “Jesus as the Eldest Brother and Ancestor? A Vietnamese Portrait,” *The Living Light* 33:1 (Fall 1996) 37. For more details on the arguments made by Léopold Cadière, see his *Croyances et Pratiques Religieuses des Annamites*, [volume 1], (Paris: Ecole Française D’Extrême-Orient, 1944) 25-32. For Cadière, all these three religions are foreign imports and he concludes that “la vraie religion des Annamites est le culte des Esprits” [the true religion of the Vietnamese is the cult of the Spirits]. *Ibid.*, 32 and 6 respectively. For an overview of the history of Confucianism in Vietnam, see also Van Doan Tran, “Confucianism: Vietnam,” in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, edited by A.S. Cua (New York: Routledge, 2003) 173-7; Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003) 126-32.

<sup>219</sup> For Yves Raguin, these three religions are, “each in its own way, humanisms”.... Where Buddhism seeks for a humanity ‘liberated’ from all illusions and the weight of *karma*, Taoism looks for human ‘liberation’ from excessive constraints and the return to the state of simple nature. Confucianism, in its turn, wants a ‘liberated’ humanity, but through acceptance of an order that expresses the harmony between heaven and earth.” See *The Depth of God* (Hertfordshire: 1979) 14; quoted by George Gispert-Sauch, “Asian Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by David F. Ford (New York: Blackwell, 1997) 470-1.

<sup>220</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 93.

<sup>221</sup> Peter C. Phan, “The Christ of Asia: An Essay on Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor,” *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996) 33. Elsewhere Phan notes that Confucius adds “two more relationships: between elder brother and younger brother, and between friends,” and states that for Confucius, “the most fundamental obligation in these relationships is filial piety (*hieu thao*; Chinese: *hsiao*), the all-encompassing virtue in Vietnamese morality.” See *Mission and Catechesis*, 21.

absence of the formal veneration of ancestors, the early European missionaries emphasised instead the fact that Christianity also accepts the moral principles of three relationships and five cardinal virtues, the fundamental basis of Confucian ethics.

From this dialogical engagement with the Vietnamese traditions these European missionaries articulated the doctrine of the “three fathers” right from the beginning the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>222</sup> This doctrine combines the Christian idea of God the Father with the ethics of Confucianism; it was first discussed in the 1651 *Catechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes.<sup>223</sup> In this bilingual (Latin-Romanised Vietnamese) catechism, the author, considered by many as the founder of Vietnamese Christianity,<sup>224</sup> notes that the concept of the “three fathers” had already existed in Vietnam before the missionaries set foot on Vietnamese soil, and that, what the missionaries did was simply to make it clearer and more precise.<sup>225</sup> For de Rhodes, “there are three grades of superiors or fathers who require commensurate veneration and reverence from us. The lowest grade is composed of the father and mother who give birth to our bodies; the middle grade of the king who governs our country; lastly, the highest grade of the Lord of heaven and earth, the true Lord above all things.”<sup>226</sup> Therefore, we have to show filial piety, respect, and obedience towards our parents, to honour the king, who is the father of the entire nation, and to worship God, “the supreme Father and Lord of

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<sup>222</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 93, 96.

<sup>223</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 95-8, 102-3. See the translation of “*The Catechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes, s.j.,” by Peter C. Phan in Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 220-3; see also Peter C. Phan, “Alexandre de Rhodes’ Mission to Vietnam: Catechesis and Inculturation,” *Vietnamologica* 3 (1998) 3-32. According to Mark D. Luttio, “Ricci claimed that pristine Confucianism was essentially compatible with Christianity, developing out of a context of monotheism and only later acquiring polytheistic accretions.” See “The Chinese Rites Controversy (1603-1742): A Diachronic and Synchronic Approach,” *Worship* 68 (4 July 1994) 294.

<sup>224</sup> See for instance, Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 38.

<sup>225</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 103. For Alexandre de Rhodes, “it is apparent that the Vietnamese, following their reason, venerate three different kinds of father, even though they have not recognized clearly that the Supreme Father is the Supreme Ruler, to whom, in the presence of the mandarins and the mobility, the king of Vietnam offers the sacrifice in the name of his subjects” in the solemn ceremony of *Nam Giao* held at the beginning of every year. See “*The Catechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes, s.j.,” by Peter C. Phan in *Mission and Catechesis*, 221-2.

<sup>226</sup> See “*The Catechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes, s.j.,” by Peter C. Phan in Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 220.

all things, who creates and preserves heaven and earth and all things.”<sup>227</sup> This doctrine, according to Trần Văn Toàn, was the outcome of a successful inculturation of the Christian faith in the cultures of Vietnam, and it actually became a new theological element and a key message that the missionaries communicated to the Vietnamese people at that time.<sup>228</sup> However, despite this early success,<sup>229</sup> and given the continuing perception of the Vietnamese people that the Catholic religion was a foreign cultural implantation,<sup>230</sup> the Vietnamese bishops in 1980 still considered that inculturation of the Christian faith in the context of Vietnam was a major challenge for the Church, second only to the *ad extra* mission of the faithful to share in the struggle of all the people of Vietnam to defend and develop the country.

This *ad extra* mission of the Church, a third focus of the 1980 pastoral letter, is a theological theme that is linked to the above-mentioned motifs of service and solidarity. It is also a fundamental idea that the Vietnamese bishops draw from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, which teach that the Church carries on a double mission to the world, one a prophetic in character, the other pastoral. The first aspect of this mission, discussed at length in the Degree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, is to proclaim the Gospel with the express purpose of converting people. The second element of the Church’s *ad extra* mission, which purports to aid the world to succeed in its own project, is explicated in *Gaudium et Spes*. According

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<sup>227</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 97-8; see also “*The Catechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes, s.j.,” by Peter C. Phan in *Mission and Catechesis*, 220-2.

<sup>228</sup> Trần Văn Toàn, *ibid.*, 93.

<sup>229</sup> For a comprehensive assessment of the effort of inculturation of Alexandre de Rhodes see Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 191-202. Phan concludes that while “it would be too much to expect de Rhodes, a missionary of the seventeenth century, to think of inculturation” in contemporary terms and understanding, “let alone to set out to achieve it,” what he “has done in his mission and catechesis in Vietnam far surpassed what the official church of his times could have dreamed of, even in its most catholic moments.” *Ibid.* 202.

<sup>230</sup> In his intervention at the Asian Synod, Archbishop Stephen Nguyen Nhu The of Huế observed that “there is still a deep division among Vietnamese Catholics” with regard to the veneration of ancestors, and, despite the application of the instructions of *Plane compertum est* (8 December 1939) in the Church in Vietnam, many of them do not willingly adopt this practice due to the Church’s earlier teachings. See “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002) 125. He concluded that “because of this Vietnamese Catholics are regarded as impious children and Catholicism a foreign religion.” *Ibid.*

to Walter Kasper, this theme ‘*ecclesia ad extra*’ was the determining factor in the final version of this Pastoral Constitution.<sup>231</sup>

By applying the conciliar idea of mission to the world in the context of Vietnam in 1980, the VEC affirmed that the mission of the Vietnamese faithful is to live the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of their compatriots: it was to be concretely implemented in the first place in the defence and development of the nation. Thus, the Vietnamese bishops held together the two dimensions of the *ad extra* mission explained by Vatican II. Firstly, they retained the primacy of evangelisation but understood it, not as a verbal and explicit proclamation, but as a living proclamation by way of “living the Gospel” or giving a witness of life.<sup>232</sup> Secondly, they brought into relief the other aspect of the Church’s mission to the world, which is to seek the good of the people and to help the world succeed in its own activities. In this manner, they implicitly connected the prophetic and pastoral dimensions of the Church’s *ad extra* mission with the concept of witness of life, the fourth major theme of 1980 pastoral letter.

In this historic document, the Vietnamese bishops discuss the theme of life witness in their exhortations addressed to the laity, the religious, and the priests of Vietnam. First, drawing on *Lumen Gentium* no. 31 and *Gaudium et Spes* no. 43, they encourage lay people to live the Gospel of Christ by engaging in temporal affairs.<sup>233</sup> Secondly, quoting directly from the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI the VEC highlights the special vocation of the religious as “the living expression of the church’s aspiration to respond to the more exigent demands of the beatitudes,” and “by their manner of life they constitute a symbol of total dedication to the service of

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<sup>231</sup> Walter Kasper, “The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Communio* 23 (Spring 1996) 135.

<sup>232</sup> In their response to the *Lineamenta* prior to the Asian Synod, the VEC declares that the Church in Vietnam “thinks of evangelization first as a sharing in life, a life as Jesus himself lived it: a life of love for all, a love which goes to the end .... In other words, to evangelise is synonymous with being a witness to Jesus Christ ... through a life worthy of being his disciple.” See VEC, “Catechesis and Pastoral Ministry,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 50; see also Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [Vietnamese Episcopal Conference], “Bản trả lời các câu hỏi” [“Responses to the *Lineamenta*’s Questions”], *Định Hướng* 16 (1998) 88.

<sup>233</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 12.

God, of the church, and of their fellow men.”<sup>234</sup> Finally, speaking to both diocesan and religious priests, considered as their closest collaborators, the bishops encourage them to demonstrate to the laity by their manner of life how the Gospel is to be lived in a spirit of love and faithfulness to the Church.<sup>235</sup> For the VEC, all members of the Church will receive the necessary grace of the risen Christ to become new persons who act with justice and holiness.<sup>236</sup>

Following Vatican II, the VEC affirms that the vocation of the laity is to sanctify themselves in the world by living the Gospel in the midst of earthly responsibilities.<sup>237</sup> Through lay people’s presence and activity, the Church is present to the society and contributes to the material and spiritual life of the nation.<sup>238</sup> Their lofty mission is to live as the faithful members of the Church of Christ and to act as the good citizens of the nation.<sup>239</sup> Therefore, they must develop a sense of truth and justice, and a willingness to serve the good of the nation.<sup>240</sup> The grace of the Holy Spirit will assist them in their life of prayer, both in private and in the family or parish, and through religious instruction and catechesis within the family.<sup>241</sup> The family, writes the VEC, should become a school of faith, a place of prayer, an environment for nurturing a life of charity, and the place for forming an apostolic spirit required by the witnesses of God.<sup>242</sup>

The five major themes of the 1980 pastoral letter discussed above, namely service, solidarity, *ad extra* mission, witness of life, and for the laity, sanctification in the

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<sup>234</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 13. The correct number of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* should be 69 rather than 60.

<sup>235</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 14.

<sup>236</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 10.

<sup>237</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 12; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43.

<sup>238</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 12.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

midst of the world, clarify and amplify the encompassing mission of the Vietnamese Church. Taken together, they are the way that the Vietnamese bishops intend to address the two overriding pastoral issues in the context of Vietnam. First, how can the Vietnamese Church evangelise? Second, how can the Church engage the Communist society and culture? Their answers to these questions arise from grappling with three fundamental questions: What is the Church? What is the Church for? Where is the Church?

For the VEC, the Church is the people of God (no. 6), a community of Christians that exists for humanity (no. 7), yet lives in the midst of the people (no. 8). First of all, then, the Church is the people of the new covenant, the Church of Christ that comprises peoples from all the countries, united by the Holy Spirit and having a new commandment which is charity and love.<sup>243</sup> It has a structure right from its inception with various functions established by the Lord for the benefit of the Mystical Body.<sup>244</sup> Its purpose is to continue to build up the Kingdom of God until the end time.<sup>245</sup> Secondly, its mission is to permeate the world with the spirit of the Gospel and to bring the temporal realities to completion.<sup>246</sup> Therefore, no human activity is alien to the mission of the Church and every ecclesial activity has to do with human life.<sup>247</sup> The ultimate purpose of all activity of the Church is to bring all humanity and all realities of the human world into participation in the life, the charity, and the truth of God.<sup>248</sup> Recalling *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 43), the VEC declares that Christians who seek to escape their earthly responsibilities are shirking their duties towards their neighbours, neglecting God, and hence endangering their eternal salvation.<sup>249</sup> The mission of the Church is, in a nutshell, to continue the mission of the Lord who came,

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<sup>243</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 6.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 7.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.



not to be served but to serve all humanity.<sup>250</sup> Finally, this Church must be the holy Church of the Lord Jesus Christ that lives in the midst of the nation.<sup>251</sup> For the Vietnamese bishops, to be the Church of the Lord means to live in communion with Christ and in unity with the universal Church, to maintain communion with the Pope and with others, and to remain faithful to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, in an attitude of openness, dialogue, and solidarity with the society in which one lives.<sup>252</sup>

There is no doubt that this new attitude of Vatican II towards the world came at an opportune moment for the Church in Vietnam, which subsequently adopted a similar *novus habitus mentis*. It provided this Church with a pastoral impetus for dialogical engagement, rather than confrontation and condemnation, with the Communist Government.<sup>253</sup> Nonetheless, a careful analysis of the 1980 pastoral letter shows that its relationship with the Government was fundamentally dialectical. On the one hand, the Vietnamese Church wished to engage in a sincere dialogue and a full cooperation with the Government to achieve commonly shared goals. On the other hand, it took a prophetic stand on the centrality of the human person as the ultimate basis for its dialogical engagement with the Government.

By placing the human person at the centre of its contextual and relational theology, the VEC has closely followed the lead of *Gaudium et Spes* and explicated the Church's positive relationship with society on the basis of three fundamental realities of human existence, namely human activity, human community, and the centrality of the human person.<sup>254</sup> This observation suggests that the 1980 pastoral letter is, to a

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 8.

<sup>252</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 8.

<sup>253</sup> In *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 42, the Council declares that "Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one." The Council Fathers went on to declare that "the Church desires nothing more ardently than to develop itself untrammelled in the service of all men under any regime which recognizes the basic rights of the person and the family, and the needs of the common good." Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 7. In *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40, the Council affirms that "all we have said up to now about the dignity of the human person, the community of mankind, and the deep significance of human activity, provides a basis for discussing the relationship between the Church and the world and the dialogue between them." The headings of the first three chapters of Part One of the Pastoral Constitution read respectively "The Dignity of the Human Person," "The Community of Mankind," and "Man's Activity in the Universe." See Vatican Council II, "*Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral

large extent, a contextual interpretation of the teaching of the Pastoral Constitution in the Vietnamese *Sitz-im-Leben*.<sup>255</sup>

We also note that in the very sensitive context of Vietnam in 1980, the VEC has deliberately refrained from making any explicit reference to the first chapter of Part One of *Gaudium et Spes*, which deals with the dignity of the human person and atheism, and the Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae*, another conciliar masterpiece of the Council. In this Declaration the Council asserts that “the human person has the right to religious freedom,” and this right is based on “the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.”<sup>256</sup> It moves on to acknowledge the legal authority of the state but affirms that the Church will choose to follow God if a policy of the Government does not comply with the will of God.<sup>257</sup> We argue that this judicious decision of the bishops of Vietnam, which was based on a careful reading of the signs of the times, did not cloud nor compromise their theological principles but laid a solid foundation for a pastoral development that always centers on the human person. Indeed, by placing the human person at the heart of the theology of the 1980 pastoral letter, the bishops have adopted a theological position that will inevitably lead them to insist on the need for the Communist Government to respect religious freedom,<sup>258</sup> human

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Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. edition (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 913, 924, and 933 respectively.

<sup>255</sup> In light of the alignment of the VEC’s thinking with the teaching of Vatican II, we take issue with *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Chris McGillion’s assertion in 1993 that “collectively, the country’s aged bishops are politically timid and over-anxious about the challenge which the Second Vatican Council has posed for the Church in other countries.” See “Rome’s Next Domino,” *The Tablet* (25 September 1993) 1224.

<sup>256</sup> *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 2.

<sup>257</sup> *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 11. Pope Benedict XVI echoes this view in his letter to the Chinese Catholics by declaring that “the Church that is in China does not have a mission to change the structure or administration of the state; rather, her mission is to proclaim Christ to all men and women as the Savior of the world, basing herself—in carrying out her proper apostolate—on the power of God.” See “Letter to Chinese Catholics,” *Origins* 37:10 (2 August 2007) 148; see also “Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China,” [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_china\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html) (accessed 12 July 2007).

<sup>258</sup> It is noteworthy that when Nguyen Van Linh assumed power in December 1986 and introduced the *doi moi* (renovation) program, admittance to seminaries was still strictly regulated by the Government, and “places were reserved for ‘patriots who love socialism’.” See Jacqueline Desbarats, “Human

dignity and human rights,<sup>259</sup> and to ensure the basic justice for all people,<sup>260</sup> especially the poor.

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Rights: Two Steps Forward One Step Back,” in *Vietnam Today: Assessing the New Trends*, edited by Thai Quang Trung (New York: Crane Russak, 1990) 49; Nguyen Minh Nhat, “Les relations entre l’Eglise et l’état: vues par le président de la conférence épiscopale,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 27. In 1988, Hanoi declared that “the proposed canonization [of 117 Vietnamese martyrs in Rome in June 1988] is a violation of the national sovereignty and an act harmful to the bloc of national unity.” See *ibid.*, 50. Therefore, no bishop was allowed to travel to Rome for the occasion. Missi, “Campagne du gouvernement contre les canonisations,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 15. For further details on the Vietnamese martyrs see Peter Nguyen Van Hai, “Canonization of 117 Vietnamese Martyrs on June 19, 1988,” *Annals Australia* (April 1988) 8-10. Ten years after *doi moi*, the Vietnamese Government still maintains a tight control of the Church’s personnel by instructing that “seminarians will be screened once by the local authorities but may be screened again as training progresses. Provincial authorities must give approval before ordination.” The Tablet, “Vietnam Keeps Church on Short Rein,” *The Tablet* (9 March 1996) 347.

<sup>259</sup> In a submission to the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party, the Vietnamese bishops stressed that “everywhere, what people want most is political democracy.” See “Toward Genuine Religious Freedom: the Submission by the Bishops of Vietnam to the Seventh Congress of their Country’s Communist Party,” *Catholic International* 2 (September 1991) 772. They also noted that “the Constitution proclaims religious liberty. In practice, however, the application of this article encounters many difficulties and obstacles.” They noted that many articles follow “a pattern that seems to be totally contradictory: ‘It is allowed to ... but permission must be obtained ...’” *Ibid.*, 773. Archbishop Jean Baptiste Phạm Minh Mẫn of Ho Chi Minh City refers to this regulation as “le système ‘demander-donner’,” a system that is “typique d’un régime injuste et aliénant.” See “Lettre de l’Archêvêque de Hồ Chí Minh-Ville au Comité d’Union du Catholicisme,” *Eglises d’Asie* 368 (1 February 2003) 28. In a speech to a meeting of South Vietnamese Catholics in 1990, which was attended by Bishop Nguyen Minh Nhat, President of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference, Mai Chi Tho, then Minister for Interior Affairs, stated that the Communist Party of Vietnam has changed since the sixth Congress in 1986, has conducted its own self-criticism, and will continue to do so. Therefore, he asked the Church to do the same by reviewing its own history and its image in an impartial and objective manner, to see if its behaviour has conformed to the teaching of the Lord. See Mai Chi Tho, “Les relations entre l’Eglise et l’Etat: vues par le ministre de l’intérieur,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991) 26.

<sup>260</sup> On 31 January 2008, the Vietnamese Government appeared to offer a concession by promising to return the former apostolic nunciature in Ha Noi to the Church “to show their good will and respect for the Pope,” after “thousands of Catholic laity and clergy held daily prayer vigils at the 2.5-acre site, which was occupied by the country’s apostolic nuncio until 1954 but used in recent decades as a night club and car park.” See The Tablet, “Vietnamese Church Regains Nunciature,” *The Tablet* (9 February 2008) 38; VietCatholic News, “Des débats internes aux instances gouvernementales retarderaient la solution de l’affaire de la Délégation apostolique,” <http://vietcatholic.org/News/Html/53190.htm> (accessed 19 March 2008). However, the road to restoration remained long and difficult: in a letter sent to Vietnam’s Prime Minister on 16 February a leader of the Government-approved Vietnamese Buddhist Church, set up in 1982, argued that the land had once been the site of an important pagoda built in 1054. As the land was confiscated by the French colonisers and given to the Catholic Church in 1883, his Church must approve all the settlements regarding the former nunciature. See VietCatholic News, “Hanoi: L’Eglise bouddhiste d’Etat revendique la propriété du domaine où est édifiée l’ancienne délégation apostolique,” [Source: *Eglises d’Asie – Dépêches* du 16 February 2008], <http://www.vietcatholic.org/News/Html/52645.htm> (accessed 28 February 2008). A week later, “an official in the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam supported the Catholic claim to the land” (VietCatholic News, “Underground Buddhists Side with Catholics in Vietnamese Property Dispute,” <http://www.vietcatholic.net/News/Html/52786.htm> [accessed 6 March 2008]). The saga continued until 19 September when the nunciature was bulldozed by the order of the Hanoi People’s Committee, and within days “a park filled with grass, shrubs and blooming flowers” was created “at the site of the nunciature, at a speed no major national project has seen before.” See An Dang, “Still on the Road to Hope,” *The Tablet* (18 October 2008) 12. It is instructive to recall the affirmation of Pope Benedict XVI that “justice is the both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics” (*Deus Caritas Est*:

Such a person-centred and incarnational theology seeks to bring the Church in Vietnam into the heart of Vietnamese society. It speaks in humble and sincere terms to all members of the Church and offers a theological framework for dealing with the numerous problems facing the country. By envisaging the Church in service of the people in their concrete, existential and historical circumstances, the 1980 pastoral letter sets a new direction for the evangelising mission of the Church in Vietnam. In the process, it fosters a rebirth of Vietnamese Catholic identity, and indicates a decisive transition from the focus on internal consolidation of the Church to the promotion of evangelisation by witness of life and engagement with the wider society. Therefore, the 1980 pastoral letter must be evaluated within the larger framework of religious integrity and social responsibility. To a large extent it is successful on three criteria—unity, clarity, and relevance. First, its theology provided a framework for uniting the two ecclesial communities in North and South Vietnam. Second, its ecclesiology clarified the mission of the Church and the laity in a new society that was centrally re-engineered by an atheistic Government. Third, its message was highly pertinent to the social and political situation of the Church and the country at the time. Therefore, despite its seemingly ambiguous character, the encompassing summary statement of the 1980 pastoral letter must be seen as a vehicle that the Vietnamese bishops utilised to enlighten (*lumen*) the faithful rather than to limit (*limen*) the full scope of the evangelising mission of the Church in Vietnam. Indeed, with this historic document, a new chapter in the history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam has begun, and it unfolded in the pastoral letters in the following two decades. In the next section we will briefly trace the development of the theology of the VEC in these pastoral letters paying particular attention to the mission of the laity and focusing on the 2001 pastoral letter. To highlight the prominent features of the VEC's theology of the laity we will also compare it with the thought of Pope John Paul II and the FABC.

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Encyclical," no. 28, *Origins* 35:33 [2 February 2006] 551). The Pontiff reiterated St Augustin's assertion that "a state which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves." Ibid. He went on to stress that "the church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the state. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice." Ibid.

## 9.4 Thereafter

In many obvious respects the 1980 pastoral letter represented the end of one era and the beginning of a new one. The Vietnamese Church's open condemnation of Communism over the previous half of the century ended with the surrender of the South Vietnamese Government on 30 April 1975. The Church initially turned inward in reaction to a heavy-handed Communist policy which considered religion as the opium for/of the people.<sup>261</sup> All religious activities required permission, and were confined to the Church precincts and closely monitored. By 1980, after five years of tension and wait-and-see, the mutual fear and suspicion between the Church and the Communist Government remained. However, with the inaugural meeting of the entire episcopate in 1980 and the drafting of the first pastoral letter, the Vietnamese bishops rejected the marginal role that the Government prescribed, and affirmed that the Church shares the same destiny and travels the same journey with all the peoples of the country. This vision was reiterated and strengthened in subsequent pastoral letters until 2001 when they took a major step forward in response to the onslaught of globalisation on a mainly agrarian society, firmly in the grip of a one-party Government,<sup>262</sup> and its attendant marginalisation of the majority of the population. Therefore, the development of a theology of the laity in these pastoral letters can be divided into two phases. First is the period of flexible responses to the Government's pressures for an active cooperation leading up to the pastoral letter of 2000 when the VEC celebrated *inter alia* the twentieth anniversary of the 1980 pastoral letter.<sup>263</sup> The second time frame is marked by the specific topics that each letter addresses,

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<sup>261</sup> According to Lenin, for the Communist party "religion is not a (neutral) private affair, but 'opium for the people' (not opium *of* the people, as Marx had called it)." See Vu Kim Chinh, "Cooperation as Mutual Liberation – Background of Emerging Relationship Between the State and the Catholic Church in Vietnam," in *Church & State Relations in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia*, edited by Beatrice Leung (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 1996) 181. For Marx, as the opium of the people, "religion could be used to control populations and divert their attention from the need to start a social revolution by simply promising them paradise in the next world." See Celestino Migliore, "How the Holy See Works on the International Scene," *Origins* 34:29 (6 January 2005) 470.

<sup>262</sup> By July 2005, agriculture is still the occupation of 56.8% of the labour force, followed by 37% in industry, and 6.2% in services. See Central Intelligence Agency, "Vietnam [last updated on 24 January 2008]," in *The World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html> (accessed 1 February 2008).

<sup>263</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2000, no. 1.

commencing with the 2001 pastoral letter, which articulates a new way of evangelisation in Vietnam.

#### 9.4.1 Overview of the VEC's Pastoral Letters from 1983 to 2007

A prominent feature of the VEC's pastoral letters in the first phase is their constant reference to the key messages of the 1980 pastoral letter discussed in the previous section. In a two-page letter issued in 1983, with a focus on the Holy Year of Salvation, the Vietnamese bishops encouraged the faithful to read again the 1980 letter. However, being conscious of its potential ambiguity they cautioned that the document has to be studied in its entirety and not selectively (no. 2). For them, this letter has given the Church a renewed faith and brought about significant achievements for the Church and the country (no. 2). Therefore, the faithful must continue the chosen path of living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of all compatriots and contribute towards the defence of peace and life on earth (no. 2). In 1986 they reviewed the internal and external activities of the Church, the unity and ministry of the Church together with an accent on the duty to live and share Christian joy. The bishops urged the faithful to make a greater effort to fulfil the duty of developing and defending the country (no. 4), and suggested that they utilise the concluding message of the 1980 letter to support each other in their endeavour to live the Gospel in the midst of the people.<sup>264</sup> The 1989 letter also deals with the unity and ministry of the Church, and contains an encouragement for all the faithful to live and share the joy of faith. It also recalls the contributions made by the clergy, religious, and the laity in the task of developing and defending the country. The 1991 letter was used as a vehicle to convey the main points of Pope John Paul II's *ad limina* address to the Vietnamese bishops on 24 November 1990.<sup>265</sup> It represents, to a large extent, Rome's view of the Church in Vietnam. In one of the explanatory notes, the bishops explained that the Pontiff wanted to reiterate the pastoral direction proposed by the VEC in 1980, which is to live and bring the Gospel

<sup>264</sup> In the 1980 Pastoral Letter (no. 1) the VEC encouraged the faithful to gratefully recognise that God has led the Church in the past, and based on the love of the Father, the life-giving Word of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to courageously face the present, and to confidently trust in the future.

<sup>265</sup> John Paul II, "Viet Nam Bishops' 'ad limina' Visit," *L'Osservatore Romano* 48 (26 November 1990) 1-2.

into society for the service of the happiness of all compatriots (no. 1). In the same vein, the 1992 letter outlines for the faithful the directions to follow and the tasks to accomplish their mission to live out the Gospel and collaborate in the work of the nation (no. 15). It also stresses that lay people are called to be the leaven, the salt, and the light of the world (no. 16). Therefore, their responsibility is to build up the society in conformity with the Gospel values, and not to separate religious life from social and secular activities (no. 16). Through their engagement in the world the faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ (no. 16).

In 1995 the VEC released only a short communiqué to the faithful. However, the bishops dispatched a formal letter to the Prime Minister to raise concerns about the Government's restrictions of pastoral activities and issues relating to personnel and properties of the Church.<sup>266</sup> They also sought his permission to publish a Catholic magazine. In 1997, they wrote again asking him to help remove the remaining hurdles for the publication of the quarterly "Hiệp Thông" ("Communion"),<sup>267</sup> a full year after having received his formal authorisation.<sup>268</sup> The lack of such a publication no doubt impeded the ongoing formation of lay people, even though these faithful, according to the bishops, are thirsting for the word of God and want to contribute to build up the Church and develop the country.<sup>269</sup> In the pastoral letter of the same year, they thanked lay people for their suggestions and urged them to collaborate to build up a Church in communion with God, with one another, and with all their compatriots,

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<sup>266</sup> In his customary New Year's address to the Vatican diplomatic corps in 1996, John Paul II "denounced the lack of religious liberty in some Muslim countries, and in China and Vietnam." The Tablet, "Plain Speaking in the Pope's Message for the New Year," *The Tablet* (20 January 1996) 88.

<sup>267</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1996, no. 7.

<sup>268</sup> See "Thư gửi Ngài Thủ Tướng Chính phủ của Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (11-10-1997) [Letter to His Excellency the Prime Minister from the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (11-10-1997)]," in *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)* [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 1980-2000], 531. In Vietnam, cooperation between the departments of the central Government is low, and local governments [fifty-nine provinces and five municipalities] enjoy considerable autonomy. These problems are compounded by another cultural factor often invoked as "the emperor's rule stops at the village gate." See Peter N.V. Hai, "Recent Public Service Reform in Vietnam," in *Infrastructural Development and Legal Change in Vietnam*, edited by Graham Hassall and Truong Truong (Melbourne: Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies, The University of Melbourne, 1994) 130. The Economist observes that in Vietnam "leadership remains collective and consensual" and "no personality cults are allowed, other than the one idolising Ho Chi Minh, the revolutionary leader, who died in 1969." See "Plenty to Smile About," *The Economist* (31 March 2007) 29.

<sup>269</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1996, no. 3.

with the aim to complete Jesus's mission of love and service in the midst of the nation.<sup>270</sup> For them, by a life of sacrifice, lay people bear witness to God's love in the midst of the world, and express the Church's concerns for society and people, especially the poor and the sick.<sup>271</sup> The following year, the bishops used the pastoral letter to explain the major themes of the 1998 Asian Synod and reflected on the preparation for the Holy Year of 2000.<sup>272</sup> In this letter the bishops reiterated the 1980 injunction of "living the Gospel in the midst of our people,"<sup>273</sup> and reflected on the role of the laity, family, women, youth, migrant workers, the intellectual (nos. 4-12) as well the role of the religious (no. 14) and the clergy (15-19). They also highlighted the issue of inculturation, and for this first time, the importance of interreligious dialogue (no. 13).

Joy was the theme of the bishops' next pastoral letter (1999). Here they reflected on its Trinitarian foundation (no. 1),<sup>274</sup> reminded the faithful of Christ's active presence in the Holy Scriptures, historical events, the neighbours, the soul, the Church, the poor, and the Eucharist (no. 2), and stressed the need for conversion, reconciliation, and renewal as preparation for the 2000 Jubilee. At their gathering in October 2000, the bishops recalled that this date was the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the Vietnamese hierarchy (24 November 1960), the twentieth of the inaugural assembly of the entire episcopate (24 April–1 May 1980), and the first of the promulgation of Pope John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Asia*.<sup>275</sup> The bishops hastened to observe that the pastoral direction articulated in the 1980 pastoral letter, namely, "living the Gospel in the midst of the people," has motivated the Church to live, to bear witness, and to proclaim the Good News *à la vietnamienne*.<sup>276</sup> For them, these three aspects of Christian mission are inseparable (no. 3). In the last part of this letter,

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<sup>270</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1997, no. 4.

<sup>271</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1997, no. 3.

<sup>272</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1998, nos. 3-19.

<sup>273</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1998, no. 6.

<sup>274</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 1999.

<sup>275</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2000, no.1.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.



the VEC draws from the proposals of *Ecclesia in Asia* to offer six guidelines to help the faithful to live, to witness, and to proclaim the Gospel (nos. 6-12).

The 2001 pastoral letter continues these reflections but, in a marked break with all previous documents, the VEC develops an entirely new pastoral direction focusing on the “mission of love and service.” It closes a chapter in the history of the Church under the Communist governance that lasted for twenty-one years, and opens a new one, theologically and pastorally more promising. In many ways it epitomises the process of re-writing the Church’s relationship with the Communist-controlled society which started in 1980 and further deepening the Church’s identity and mission. With this pastoral letter, the second phase of the VEC’s pastoral letters began. From this year, the Church became decidedly more prophetic by regularly raising its concerns on numerous issues confronting the nation, especially the need to respect human dignity and human rights.<sup>277</sup> This period has also been distinguished by a fresh outlook on the Church, and the result was the construction and celebration of a more articulated mission for the Church and the laity, an endeavour that took expression in the pastoral letters issued between 2001 and 2007. Given the focus of this chapter we will provide here only a brief survey of these statements, except the 2001 document, which requires a fuller treatment.

The overall plan of the 2001 pastoral letter follows the “see, judge, act” methodology and comprises three parts: “Context,” “Pastoral Directions in the New Context,” and “Developing the Capacities to Implement the Pastoral Directions.” Its purpose is stated right in the opening sentence: to look back at the life of the Church during the last decades of the previous century and to reflect on the road ahead in the new millennium.<sup>278</sup> The key questions the bishops asked themselves were: what are the

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<sup>277</sup> Jacqueline Desbarats argues that “contradiction and selectivity” are “the keys to an understanding of Hanoi’s human rights record”: “by coopting selected opponents and jailing or executing those unresponsive to cooptation, it significantly reduced internal threats to regime consolidation. By repeatedly denying harsher forms of repression, it terrorized domestic opponents and confirmed the unassailable nature of that regime’s power base. By using obfuscations and euphemisms in its public statements, it deterred domestic opponents while deluding international opinion. Finally, by giving selective evidence of leniency, it slowed down the process of international condemnation.” See “Human Rights: Two Steps Forward One Step Back,” in *Vietnam Today: Assessing the New Trends*, edited by Thai Quang Trung (New York: Crane Russak, 1990) 64.

<sup>278</sup> My loose translation of the text.

particular contexts of the country and the Church at the beginning of the new millennium, and, what should be the appropriate pastoral directions to fulfil God's will that "they may have life and have it to the full."<sup>279</sup> Their answer is that the task of the Church, hence of the laity, is "to continue the Lord Jesus's mission of love and service."<sup>280</sup> To accomplish this duty the faithful have to journey with the people,<sup>281</sup> to dialogue with the poor, the ethnic minorities, the migrant workers, believers and followers of other religions,<sup>282</sup> to inculturate the faith in local cultures,<sup>283</sup> and to work with all peoples to reduce the culture of death, lies, oppression, injustice, violence, and inhumanity by building up a new society of truthfulness, justice, respect for life and human rights, and at the same time, developing a civilisation of love and peace as encouraged by Pope John Paul II in his letter on the Third Millennium.<sup>284</sup> To achieve these objectives the faithful must renew their way of thinking and acting, both individually and as communities,<sup>285</sup> from the family, society, youth, women, dioceses, parishes, and religious congregations to Church groups and movements.<sup>286</sup>

Three observations illustrate the fresh approach of the 2001 pastoral letter. First is the recurrent use of the term "mới," which means "new." It appears fourteen times in instances such as new millennium,<sup>287</sup> new phase,<sup>288</sup> new problems,<sup>289</sup> new context,<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 6. The biblical phrase from John 10:10, which appears in the title of this pastoral letter, was wrongly cited as taken from "Ga 10,10."

<sup>280</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 9.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., nos. 10-3.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., no. 15.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., no. 16.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., nos. 18-22.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., nos. 1, 6.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. no. 1.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., no. 2.

<sup>290</sup> Section heading before no. 9, VEC's Pastoral Letter 2001.

new challenges,<sup>291</sup> “dialogue is a new name of hope,”<sup>292</sup> “new class people,”<sup>293</sup> “new society,”<sup>294</sup> “renew the way of thinking and doing,”<sup>295</sup> and “self-renewal and renewal of ecclesial communities.”<sup>296</sup> The second feature has to do with the call for respect of human dignity and human rights,<sup>297</sup> the sensitive topics that were not openly addressed in previous pastoral letters. Thirdly, for the first time, with a clear reference to the FABC’s vision of triple dialogue, the Vietnamese bishops discuss the dialogue with the poor and oppressed such as the ethnic minorities and the migrant workers,<sup>298</sup> the religions,<sup>299</sup> and the fifty-four distinct cultures in Vietnam.<sup>300</sup> However, this pastoral letter is still very much connected to the 1980 document by its emphasis on the centrality of the human person,<sup>301</sup> and the concepts of service, solidarity, dialogue, inculturation, renewal, and development of the country and society.<sup>302</sup> To a large extent, it is the blueprint for the Church in Vietnam at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and within this general pastoral framework the bishops dealt with other specific topics in subsequent years.

The 2002 pastoral letter has as its focus the sanctification of the family, followed by the bishops’ emphasis on the evangelising mission in the next letter. In 2004 they

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<sup>291</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 9.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., no. 10. This phrase is taken from the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 2001 Synod of Bishops, no. 30.

<sup>293</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 11. This term refers to the migrant workers within the country.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., no. 15.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., no. 16. The actual verb used is “đổi mới,” a Vietnamese term consisted of two words: “to change” and “new.”

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., nos. 21, 22.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., nos. 11, 15, 20. The VEC returned to these ideas in the 2006 Pastoral Letter, nos. 5, 7.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., nos. 11-2.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., no. 13.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., no. 14. These ethnic groups comprise “Kinh (Viet) 86.2%, Tay 1.9%, Thai 1.7%, Muong 1.5%, Khome 1.4%, Hoa [Chinese] 1.1%, Hmong 1%, others 4.1% (1999 census).” See Central Intelligence Agency, “Vietnam [last updated on 24 January 2008],” in *The World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html> (accessed 1 February 2008).

<sup>301</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 17.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., nos. 3, 19.

reflected on the theme of the Church's living the Eucharistic mystery and the following year on living the word of God. In 2006, they returned to the 2001 theme of love and service as the concrete way of living the faith. Finally, in 2007, they discussed the topic of Christian education.<sup>303</sup> One feature that is common to these letters is that they are intensely pastoral and formative with a particular focus on the life and mission of lay people in their everyday life. These selective topics seem to serve as a corrective to the bishops' own acknowledgement in 2001 that, in terms of lay formation, they have not done enough. Therefore, in 2002, they encouraged parishes to organise training courses on marriage and family, and to seek the active participation of competent lay instructors.<sup>304</sup> The following year they encouraged lay people to lead an honest life and demonstrate their respect for human life by living in conformity with an informed conscience and by witnessing to the kingdom of God.<sup>305</sup> The lay faithful have to show an exemplary life of charity and in communion by maintaining the unity and love in the family, the ward, the parish and the diocese.<sup>306</sup> They also need to structure their life around the Eucharist, the source of strength needed for their sanctification and engagement in secular affairs.<sup>307</sup> In 2005, the

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<sup>303</sup> In July 2007, the Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City cited press reports of a social survey which estimates that 30-40% of primary school children regularly commit fraud and lie. This figure increases to 40-50% and 50-60% among students in high schools and universities respectively. See Phạm Minh Mẫn [Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City], "Giáo đức và Giáo dục" [Education of Virtues and Scholastic Education], <http://www.vietcatholic.net/News/Html/45841.htm> (accessed 24 July 2007). National education is also a crisis facing Vietnam. See Lâm Thanh Liêm and Jean Maïs, "Vietnam: Les impasses de l'éducation nationale," *Eglises d'Asie* 391 (February 2004) 2-19; "Education et formation professionnelle au Vietnam," *Dossiers et documents* No. 4, *Eglises d'Asie* (April 2000) 1-19; "L'éducation au Vietnam: Une crise qui se prolonge," *Dossiers et documents* no. 2, *Eglises d'Asie* 289 (February 1995). <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org>. (accessed 8 December 2006). The country still "lags well behind other countries in the region with only two percent of its population having received thirteen years or more of education." See Michael W. Marine, "Remarks by Ambassador Michael W. Marine: Challenges of Higher Education in Vietnam: Possible Roles for the United States," <http://hanoi.usembassy.gov/ambspeech080607.html> (accessed 22 August 2007). The 2006 World Bank report also shows that "only two international patent applications were submitted by Vietnamese residents." *Ibid.*; see also Jago Penrose, Jonathan Pincus and Scott Cheshier, "Vietnam: Beyond Fish and Ships," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 170:7 (September 2007) 45. It was reported that "Intel [which opened its \$1 billion factory near the capital, Hanoi] delivered a blow to Vietnam's self-image as a rising star in knowledge-based industries when the company announced that after testing 2,000 students from the five top technology universities only 40 students met their standards." See Jonathan Pincus and Vu Thanh Tu Anh, "Vietnam Feels the Heat," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (May 2008) 32.

<sup>304</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2002, no. 7.

<sup>305</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2003, no. 10.

<sup>306</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2003, no. 11.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 11.

bishops invited lay people to return to the parable of the sower and be conscious that they are both the sowers and the field.<sup>308</sup> Facing the word of God they must prepare their soul as the fertile land, and facing other people they must become assiduous and patient sowers.<sup>309</sup> This is a mission that demands a lot of sacrifices and efforts, and in the life of today, which brings with it numerous challenges that could lead them to waver and despair, they must remember Jesus on the road to Emmaus, the companion who gave two pessimistic and dispirited disciples joy and strength by his explication of the Scriptures.<sup>310</sup> The following year, interpreting the vocation to holiness, the bishops affirmed that the honour of becoming the children of God required Christians to grow each day in His love, to become more mature in their faith, hope, and charity, and be like Jesus, the personification of Love.<sup>311</sup> Finally, in their 2007 pastoral letter on Christian education, addressed for the first time to the Vietnamese people of God both inside and outside Vietnam, the bishops declared that all Christians are catechists.<sup>312</sup> As branches of the vine which is Jesus, catechists draw on its sap to pass on to their students by the witness of preaching and the practice of God's commandments.<sup>313</sup>

In the previous sections we have investigated the development of the theology of lay people in the pastoral letters of the VEC between 1980 and 2007. In overview we can see that there were dynamics of continuity, discontinuity, and creativity at work in their composition. While it is difficult to assess their full impact on the Church in Vietnam, we can get a sense that these documents very much reflected the concerns of Vietnamese Christians who had to confront ever changing challenges in their everyday life. This was very much in evidence right from 1980 when the bishops of both North and South Vietnam gathered for the first time to ponder on a common direction for two ecclesial communities that had been separated for over a quarter of a

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<sup>308</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2005, no. 9c.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2006, no. 3.

<sup>312</sup> VEC's Pastoral Letter 2007, no. 21.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., no. 20.

century, not only geographically but also theologically, with one still caught up in the pre-Vatican II matrix of the Church and the other in the midst of slowly implementing conciliar reforms. In terms of time frame, this historic meeting happened only fifteen years after the close of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), ten years after the FABC's inaugural meeting in 1970, and a mere two years into the pontificate of John Paul II. The development of the VEC's theology of the laity, which took a new turn in 1980 and again in 2001, has to be seen against the development of these teachings. Indeed, not long after Vatican II ignited an extraordinary renewal that reshaped the Church and revitalised the laity, the FABC began to re-imagine how best to engage the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. This renewal was strengthened under the pontificate of John Paul II, who professed to continue the mission of both Peter and Paul by focusing on the ecclesial unity in the Church, and the Catholic message to the world. Therefore, a comparative analysis of the VEC's theology of the laity with those of the FABC and John Paul II would bring into relief the major characteristics and contours of this theological endeavour. It also highlights our argument that while some obvious distinctions remain, there is a substantial agreement between these theologies of the laity.

#### **9.4.2 *Sentire cum ecclesia*: The VEC's Theology of the Laity and the Thinking of the FABC and John Paul II**

When the theologies of the laity of John Paul II, the FABC, and the VEC are placed side by side, what naturally comes to mind is the ideas that they hold in common. After all, they share the same Gospel and Catholic traditions, in particular the teachings of Vatican II, and deal with the same subject, the vocation and mission of lay people. However, in important ways their theologies are distinct in regard to the imperative of proclamation, the concepts of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, the vocation of the laity, the preferred ecclesiological framework, and their theological motifs. Our first observation is that, even in these areas of divergences, common points can be discernable in their systems of thought.

The first noticeable divergence between these theologies relate to the treatment of proclamation. Unlike John Paul II and the FABC, who, while not denying the central importance of life witness, affirm the primacy of explicit proclamation, the

Vietnamese bishops, in the 1980 pastoral letter, considered witness of life, or living the Gospel in the midst of the people, as the best way to proclaim the Gospel in the Communist-dominated society where public preaching was forbidden outside the physical confines of local Churches. Their vision of the evangelising mission at this particular time did not highlight the imperative of explicit proclamation. In subsequent years, when religious restrictions were increasingly relaxed, they began to explain the mission of the faithful as living and proclaiming the Gospel.<sup>314</sup> For them, living and witnessing to the Gospel takes precedence over explicit proclamation. While acknowledging that the duty of direct and verbal proclamation derives from the very nature of the Gospel, the Vietnamese bishops declare that, in the context of Vietnam, life witness remains the primary and likely the only way of proclaiming the Good News.<sup>315</sup> In the 2001 pastoral letter, they affirm that the mission of the Church is to continue Jesus's mission of love and service. The FABC, on the other hand, adopts a pneumatological expression stating that mission is "a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ," and it means a triple dialogue with the poor, local cultures, and other religious traditions.<sup>316</sup> However, for John Paul II and the FABC, inculturation, dialogue, justice, and the option for the poor, are not separate topics but aspects of an integrated understanding of the Church's mission of love and service.<sup>317</sup>

The second theological divergence between John Paul II and the bishops of Asia and Vietnam has to do with the ontological difference between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood. Whereas this distinction seems to occupy an important place in the Pontiff's theology of the laity, it is not a significant issue for the Asian and Vietnamese bishops. For them, there is simply no need to explain what Asian Christians already know—the functional difference between the ordained and the non-ordained—or what they are not interested in—the ontological distinction between the two priesthoods. Therefore, the bishops of Asia have moved beyond the dualism

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<sup>314</sup> The VEC devotes the entire 2003 Pastoral Letter to reflect on the theme of proclaiming or preaching the Gospel; see also VEC's Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 6, VEC's Pastoral Letter 2006, no. 4, and VEC's Pastoral Letter 2007, no. 9.

<sup>315</sup> VEC Pastoral Letter 2000, no. 4.

<sup>316</sup> FABC V, art. 3.1.2, *FAPA Vol. I*, 280.

<sup>317</sup> FABC VII, Part III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8; *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.

between laity and clergy by recovering the vision of the Church as the people of God, and stressing that all the faithful are called to assume their rightful roles and responsibilities. Our second observation is that John Paul II tends to focus on a theology *of* the laity, an endeavour to foreground his understanding of the role of lay people against the background of *Lumen Gentium*, which teaches that the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood “differ essentially and not only in degree.”<sup>318</sup> The VEC and the FABC, on the other hand, prefer to articulate a theology *for* the laity, an invitation for lay people to understand their role in the Church and in the world, and to treasure their everyday life as a sacramental opportunity to build up the kingdom of God, to serve others and work out their salvation. At the risk of oversimplification, we also argue that the theologies of the VEC and the FABC have less to do with doctrinal confession and more to do with pastoral life, where their teachings on the role of the laity unfold in communities of disciples who live in God for the sake of other people. Whereas John Paul II tends to clarify the doctrinal role of lay people before explicating their distinctive responsibilities, the VEC and the FABC prefer to offer Jesus as an inspiration and a model in their daily living.<sup>319</sup> So, while the Pope seems to start his theology of the laity from above, with its roots in the conciliar teaching of the ontological differences between the two priesthoods, the bishops start their theologies from below, beginning with the concrete, existential and historical contexts. In terms of the approach to the modern world, unlike John Paul II, the VEC and the FABC tend to place more emphasis on *aggiornamento* (bringing the Church up to date, especially through dialogue) than on *ressourcement* (recovering the tradition or returning to the sources). To a certain extent, they are more Thomistic than Augustinian in the sense that they are more inclined to look at the signs of the times to see grace at work and find grounds for dialogue.<sup>320</sup> John Paul II, on the other hand, leans perhaps more towards the Augustinian interpretation of the Christian faith, and tends to see discontinuity and rupture in the world that requires conversion

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<sup>318</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10. In a 1994 address John Paul II declared that the fullness of ministry lies with the ordained. See “Do Laity Share in the Priest’s Pastoral Ministry?” *Origins* 24:3 (2 June 1994) 40-2.

<sup>319</sup> Leander Keck observes that “in Asia, where there has never been a ‘christendom’, many follow the teachings of Jesus but reject Christianity as a foreign religion” (“The Task of New Testament Christology,” *Theology Digest* 53:1 [Spring 2006] 31).

<sup>320</sup> See for instance, VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1998, no. 3.b.2, 4; FABC IV, art. 4.0.1, *FAPA Vol. I*, 191.



and redemption, and hence, the need to stress the explicit proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>321</sup> However, here even, the theological divergence between John Paul II and the bishops is not radical and far-reaching, and one can still find common points in their thinking. For the Pope, the call to the ministerial priesthood must be located within the broader Christian vocation as the Church, “being by her very nature a ‘vocation’,”<sup>322</sup> is itself a *mysterium vocationis*.<sup>323</sup>

To identify the similarities and differences between the theologies of vocation according to the VEC, the FABC, and John Paul II,<sup>324</sup> we will press into service four biblical dimensions of the concept of vocation suggested by Donald Senior.<sup>325</sup> For him, a biblical meaning of vocation includes four elements: first, vocation as a gift of God; second, “vocation as a fundamental call to life and holiness before God”; third,

<sup>321</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak notes that there are two orientations of postconciliar Catholic theology and attempts have been made to distinguish them such as David Tracy’s manifestation-theology and correlation-theology, *ressourcement*-approach and *aggiornamento*-approach, or patristic/Augustinian and Thomistic orientation. See “The Future of Theology in the Church,” in *New Horizons in Theology*, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 2004, vol. 50, edited by Terrence W. Tilley (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005) 29; idem, “Is Christ Divided: Insights From Vatican II for Dealing with Diversity and Disagreement,” *Origins* 33:9 (17 July 2003) 144-5. For Charles Curran, “In the years since the Council, a division has grown between these two approaches. The *ressourcement* school, identified with theologians such as Von Balthasar, Daniélou, De Lubac and Ratzinger, have been fearful of many developments in the post-conciliar Church. The *aggiornamento* group of theological Thomists, such as Congar, Rahner, Schillebeeckx, Chenu and Küng, have called for continual reform” (“From Division to Unity,” *The Tablet* [15 April 2006] 22).

<sup>322</sup> John Paul II, *I Will Give You Shepherds: Pastores Dabo Vobis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*, no. 35 (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books and Media, [1992]) 66.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., no. 34, 66; Edward P. Hahnenberg “Wondering About Wineskins: Rethinking Vocation in Light of Lay Ecclesial Ministry,” *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 40 (2005) 18.

<sup>324</sup> Edward P. Hahnenberg notes that the term “vocation” had become so problematic that the U.S. bishops “speak of the ‘call’ to lay ecclesial ministry” throughout their document [“Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord (November 2005)”) and “do not use the word ‘vocation’.” See “When the Church Calls,” *America* 195:10 (9 October 2006) 10-4. <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE> (accessed 11 October 2007), Gale Document Number: A152742193; see also U.S. Bishops, “Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” *Origins* 35:25 (1 December 2005) 405-27. For Hahnenberg, postconciliar Catholicism was left “with two distinct views of vocation: a narrow vision that equates God’s call with a static state of life and a vision so broad that it is practically equivalent to discipleship. The two sit alongside each other, and lay ecclesial ministers are caught in the middle. It was precisely the difficulty of negotiating this middle ground that caused the bishops so many problems.” Ibid. In his view, “we are still waiting for a truly post-conciliar theology of vocation,” and “it is no surprise that bishops end their document ‘Co-Workers’ with a call for ‘a more thorough study of our theology of vocation’.” See “The Vocation to Lay Ecclesial Ministry,” *Origins* 37:12 (30 August 2007) 181; U.S. Bishops, *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>325</sup> Donald Senior, “The Biblical Heritage and the Meaning of Vocation: Address to Third Continental Congress on Vocations,” *Origins* 31:46 (2 May 2002) 765.

“vocation as essentially linked to mission, to a participation in the divine work of transforming the world, a sharing in the mission of Christ to establish the reign of God”; and finally, “vocation as requiring lifelong conversion of heart and personal transformation.”<sup>326</sup> In his view, “the life of discipleship begins not with a choice but with a call,”<sup>327</sup> and “the most pervasive biblical symbol for describing the life of faith is that of journey,”<sup>328</sup> a concept that occupies a prominent place in *Gaudium et Spes*, the most important in status of all the documents of the Catholic Social Doctrine, and also the 1980 pastoral letter of the VEC. First, unlike John Paul II who insists that “each Christian vocation comes from God and is God’s gift,”<sup>329</sup> the VEC and the FABC do not emphasise this obvious doctrinal point.<sup>330</sup> Secondly, whereas John Paul II and the VEC often remind the lay faithful that sanctification by engaging in temporal affairs is their vocation,<sup>331</sup> the FABC does not generally accord the same treatment in their documents including the Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly on the vocation and mission of the laity.<sup>332</sup> However, all three often link vocation with the Church’s mission of transforming the world and building up the kingdom of God.<sup>333</sup> They also all stress that conversion and renewal are part and parcel of Christian life and vocation.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 765, also 763-4.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 762.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 765.

<sup>329</sup> John Paul II, *I Will Give You Shepherds: Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 35 (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books and Media, [1992]) 66.

<sup>330</sup> The FABC did mention that “the *sensus fidelium*, or faith-instinct, of the whole people of God is a gift of the Spirit to all as a body.” FABC IV, art. 4.4.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

<sup>331</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 12; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2006, nos. 3-4; John Paul II, “*Novo Millennio Ineunte*,” nos. 30-1, *Origins* 30:31 (18 January 2001) 499. In a public address in Baltimore in 1995, John Paul II declared that “the challenge of the great jubilee of the year 2000 is the new evangelization: a deepening of faith and a vigorous response to the Christian vocation to holiness and service” (“Homily in Oriole Park,” *Origins* 25:18 [19 October 1995] 313).

<sup>332</sup> Thomas C. Fox notes that at the FABC’s Seventh Plenary Assembly in 2000 there was a total of twenty-three workshops, and “when it was announced that a workshop on ‘holiness’ failed to attract a single person, the bishops burst into laughter” (“Polite Toward Rome, True to their Mission,” *National Catholic Reporter* [28 January 2000] 11).

<sup>333</sup> See for example, FABC IV, arts. 2.4, 3.1.2-3.1.3, 3.2.3, 3.5.5, 3.7.1, 3.7.4-3.7.5, 3.8.5, 3.9.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179, 180, 182, 186, 187, 188, and 190 respectively; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, nos. 9, 12; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1992, no. 16; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001, nos. 9, 21-22; John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9; idem, *I Will Give You Shepherds: Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 35 (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books and Media, [1992]) 67.

The fourth distinction between their theologies of the laity relates to the ecclesiological frameworks. Whereas the VEC tends to anchor its theology of the laity in the framework of the Church as the people of God, John Paul II and the FABC, while not ignoring the richness of the conciliar concept of people of God, prefer to emphasise an ecclesiology of communion.

Finally, in terms of theological motifs, it can be said that “triple dialogue” is for the FABC what “sacramental dignity” for John Paul II, and “service” for the Vietnamese bishops. However, beneath these differences there is a convergence of thinking. First, by its accent on inculturation, dialogue with the poor, and interreligious dialogue from 2001,<sup>335</sup> the VEC’s theology of the laity has become more closely aligned with the thought of the FABC and John Paul II who both highlighted the need for triple dialogue in the Asian context. Secondly, by shifting their focus on the evangelising mission as service, witness, and solidarity in 1980 to the theme of love and service in 2001, the Vietnamese bishops have effectively kept their theology of the laity in synchronisation with the universal Church and the local Churches in Asia, and in the process, demonstrating their commitment to *sentire cum ecclesia*, to think with the Church.

In terms of convergence of thought, the VEC’s pastoral letters have displayed a gradual alignment with the theologies of John Paul II and the Asian bishops, especially from 1998 when the Vietnamese bishops participated in the entire process of the Synod for Asia and later, in 2000, the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Asian bishops.<sup>336</sup> This theological convergence crystallises around the motif of love and

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<sup>334</sup> For instance, BIRA III, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120; OL, “Second Asian Laity Meeting,” art. 3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 115; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 8; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 16; John Paul II, “*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*,” no. 42, *Origins* 24 (24 November 1994) 412.

<sup>335</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001, nos. 10, 13-15; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2003, nos. 9, 11-12; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2004, no. 9.

<sup>336</sup> According to Bishop Nguyen Minh Nhat of Xuân Lộc diocese, the *ad limina* visit of the Vietnamese bishops in 1990 “marks the first time that almost all the Ordinaries of Vietnam have the honour of assembling around the throne of Christ’s Vicar on earth” (“The Hardships of the Church in Vietnam,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 48 [26 November 1990] 2). It is also noteworthy that in 1995, for the first time since April 1975, four Vietnamese bishops attended the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC held in Manila. See John S. Cummins, “Asia, Continent at a Crossroads,” *America* (14 October 1995) 4. Pope

service, which was the focus of the VEC's 2001 pastoral letter,<sup>337</sup> and found expression in both the title of The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC, "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service," and the theme of John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, which the Pontiff personally stated as: "Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: 'That they may have life and have it abundantly' (Jn. 10:10)."<sup>338</sup>

In addition to the motif of love and service, the theologies of the laity of the VEC, the FABC, and Pope John Paul II also converge on a number of other themes: the centrality of Jesus, the emphasis on life witness as the fundamental expression of the role of lay people, the inspiration from the teachings of Vatican II, and the concern for the respect of human dignity and human rights while refraining from an outright condemnation of Communism. First, all three theologies make Jesus Christ the centre of the Church's witness, and that shapes all their thinking. For the VEC, it was

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John Paul II addressed this assembly during his visit to the Philippine capital to celebrate the World Youth Day and commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> year of the Archdiocese of Manila. The Vietnamese Government initially permitted only three bishops to travel to Manila to attend just the anniversary of the Archdiocese of Manila, stating that it was the Episcopal Conference of South Vietnam that was a member of the FABC, and that the VEC had not requested nor obtained the Government's approval to become a member of the FABC. See "Les évêques du Vietnam et la Fédération des conférences épiscopale d'Asie," *Eglises d'Asie* 186 (1 November 1994), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 15 December 2006). Twelve years later, in 2007, again for the first time, a workshop jointly organised by the FABC and the Bangkok-based Asian Resource Foundation-Asian Muslim Action Network took place in Ho Chi Minh City, hosted by the Southern Institute of Social Services. See FABC and the Asian Resource Foundation-Asian Muslim Action Network, "Peace and Sustainable Development for Indigenous Peoples," *Origins* 36:47 (10 May 2007) 772-3. When the Asian bishops first met together around Pope Paul VI from 23 to 29 November 1970 to discuss the topic of *Populorum Progressio* in Asia, nine South Vietnamese bishops participated in this inaugural meeting, an event that would lead to the creation of the FABC. See Trần Anh Dũng, "Sử Lược Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533-1980) [and] Hội Đồng Giám mục Việt Nam (1980-2000) [Brief History of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1533-1980) [and] The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 1980-2000], in *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980-2000)*, edited by Trần Anh Dũng (Paris: Đắc Lộ Tùng Thư, 2001) 29; FABC, Asian Bishops' Meeting, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 3-10.

<sup>337</sup> See the first sentence of no. 9 of the VEC's Pastoral Letter 2001, which is quoted here in the French translation provided by the priests of the Missions Etrangères de Paris: "Face à cette situation sociale et ces nouveaux défis, l'Eglise a conscience que sa mission est de perpétuer la mission d'amour et de service du Seigneur Jésus." See VEC, "Lettre commune de la Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam envoyée à la communauté du peuple de Dieu pour l'année 2001," *Eglises d'Asie* 338 (1 October 2001) 24. The convergence of thought between the VEC, John Paul II, and the Asian bishops becomes even more apparent when one comes to the heading of the second part of this pastoral letter: "'Orientation pastorale à l'intérieur du contexte nouveau: amour et service': 'Pour qu'ils aient la vie et qu'ils l'aient en abondance' (Jn 10,10)." Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 2.

manifest in the pastoral letters of 1980 and 2001<sup>339</sup>; for John Paul II, it started right from his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*<sup>340</sup>; and for the FABC, it was the Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly on the vocation and mission of the laity that characterises Jesus as the Liberator.<sup>341</sup> Secondly, all three theologies stress that witness of life is a fundamental concept to define, describe, and prescribe the role of lay people. Thirdly, a common thread that runs through the documents of the VEC, the FABC, and John Paul II is their extensive reliance on the documents of Vatican II for their inspiration.<sup>342</sup> Finally, like Vatican II, there is no condemnation of Communism in the theologies of the VEC, the FABC, and John Paul II, presumably for prudential reasons.<sup>343</sup> However, all emphasise the need for Governments to respect human dignity and human rights,<sup>344</sup> the bedrock of Catholic social teachings.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> VEC Pastoral Letter 1980, nos. 7-8; VEC Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 9.

<sup>340</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (Melbourne: A.C.T.S. Publications, 1979).

<sup>341</sup> For example, in this statement the FABC declares that “the call today for us Asian Christians is to become a Church deeply committed to Jesus the Liberator. Such a commitment by all Christians will make the Church’s communion of committed disciples—be they clergy or laity—working for the liberation of Asia.” See FABC IV, art. 4.1.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>342</sup> See for example, VEC’s Pastoral Letter 1980, no. 8; FABC IV, art. 4.7.2.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194; BILA V, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 79; BILA II, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 242; BILA I, arts. 2-4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 235-6. For John Paul II, “the best preparation for the new millennium ... can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church.” See “*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*,” no. 20, *Origins* 24 (24 November 1994) 407.

<sup>343</sup> According to the FABC [1978], “Communism plays a very important role in Asia by the very fact that some 46% of all Asians live in Communist states. We are aware that communism presents different faces throughout the world. But its Asian face makes us apprehensive, although we cannot deny that they also present some positive aspects. We have criticized classical capitalism because while professedly promoting economic growth, it has deprived man of the just fruits of his labor. We now criticize communism because, while professedly promoting liberation, it has deprived man of his just human rights. In their historical realization both have hindered true human development, the one creating poverty in the midst of affluence, the other destroying freedom in the pursuit of equality.” See BISA IV, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 213.

<sup>344</sup> VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2001, nos. 11, 20; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2006, no. 7; VEC’s Pastoral Letter 2007, no. 33.

<sup>345</sup> Interviewed on the occasion of the launch of the English version of the “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” Cardinal Renato Martino states that the Compendium is centred on “the centrality of the human being and of human dignity. Human rights descend from this basis.” See Philip Crispin, “Church’s Best-Kept Secret,” *The Tablet* (11 June 2005) 8. We note that a well-developed theology of human rights became an official component of the Church’s doctrine with the release of Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* in 1963.

In sum, the VEC's pastoral letters provide a glimpse of the contextual theology of the Vietnamese bishops who have analysed the concrete, existential and historical situations in Vietnam in the light of the Gospel and Vatican II to draw out principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and guidelines of action. These letters recognise the urgent problems confronting the Church in Vietnam, and urge lay people to incorporate the new sense of Christian responsibility in the world in all the phases of their lives.<sup>346</sup> This injunction occurs in the midst of a larger and unfinished paradigm shift in the FABC's theology of the laity, one that seeks to articulate the very meaning of membership and ministry in the Asian Church. The VEC's theology of the laity reflects the teaching of Vatican II, the papal magisterium, and the ongoing development of the thought of the FABC, but retains features that are distinctly Vietnamese. Like the FABC and John Paul II, the VEC has constantly sought to encourage and empower the laity to assume greater responsibility than ever for the faith and life of the Church.

## 9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the theology of the laity in the pastoral letters of the VEC issued since the early 1950s with a special emphasis on those promulgated between 1980 and 2001, the two significant milestones in the recent history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. In 1980 the Vietnamese bishops articulated the evangelising mission of the entire Church, and hence of the laity, as "living the Gospel in the midst of the people for the service of the happiness of our compatriots." This summary statement, which emphasises the centrality of the human person, describes a dialectical relationship between the Vietnamese Church with the Government, one that is based on a sharing of the common goals such as defence and development of the nation, but also one that raises, in a gentle but firm voice, a clear opposition to all violations of the human person and the human dignity. Twenty-one years later, in 2001, they revisited and deepened this mission and reformulated it as "to continue the Lord Jesus's mission of love and service." Underlying these two courageous and

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<sup>346</sup> In their response to the *Lineamenta* of the Asian Synod, the VEC publicly acknowledges that "today, the Vietnamese 'missioners' are the ordinary lay people, women religious in particular. As in the primitive Church at Jerusalem, here it is the lay people who first carried the Good News out of Jerusalem." See VEC, "Catechesis and Pastoral Ministry," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 51; see also Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam [Vietnamese Episcopal Conference], "Bản trả lời các câu hỏi" ["Responses to the *Lineamenta*'s Questions"], *Định Hướng* 16 (1998) 89.

missionary statements, which were composed to meet the changing pastoral needs and challenges, is a constant reference to Jesus Christ and His Gospel, an emphasis on the motif of service, and a central role accorded to the laity in the Church's mission to the world. These themes are intimately linked to, and strengthened by, the concepts of solidarity, *ad extra* mission, witness of life, and holiness, the ideas that are central to the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Gaudium et Spes*, its longest and closing text. In line with the teaching of this Pastoral Constitution, the VEC's theology of the laity and its ecclesiological framework are underpinned by an anthropological orientation that is Christocentric, and draws on the insights of Paul VI, John Paul II, and the FABC. Therefore, we conclude that the richest legacy of the pastoral letters of the VEC is Jesus Christ, who is the foundation and purpose of the vocation and the mission of all the faithful.

Indeed, while each of the pastoral statements issued by the Vietnamese bishops contains a different emphasis in response to the contextual situations over the past sixty years, what unifies them is an understanding of the mission of the Church as a continuation of the mission of Jesus, the proclamation of the kingdom of God by a faithful witness to the faith that is animated by the love of Christ and the holiness of a life in service to, and in solidarity with, the people of Vietnam. With the advent of the Synod for Asia, the promulgation of John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, and the increased participation of the Vietnamese bishops in the meetings and activities of the FABC, the VEC's theology of the laity has become more aligned with the thought of John Paul II and the Asian bishops, who teach that the mission of the Church in Asia should have as its key elements proclamation, witness of life, and the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the people, especially the poor. One of the most visible signs of this theological alignment is their common emphasis on the respect and promotion of human dignity and human rights.

A new dimension of the theology proposed in the VEC's pastoral letters is a theological exploration of a pastoral dialogue with a Communist Government, an area that has received little attention from the Asian bishops. In view of the totalitarian or authoritarian nature of several national Governments in Asia, this dialogical model may provide other local Churches in the region with some useful theological and pastoral pointers, and will benefit further from a collective and deeper reflection of

the FABC. Relying on the doctrinal principles of Vatican II, John Paul II, and the FABC, and using them as a theological starting point, the Vietnamese bishops have articulated not only a theological vision but also a pastoral process for the Church in Vietnam. This vision and process was initially crafted in 1980, and has since undergone some reformulation, but always in the midst of a dramatic interaction between the Church and the Communist society, a complex dialogue that is marked by a latent confrontation between two contrasting visions of the human. One is based on an atheistic and dialectic materialism, and takes human autonomy as the ultimate good,<sup>347</sup> and the other promotes a Christ-centred vision of human wholeness and development,<sup>348</sup> and places human dignity at the centre of its philosophical reflection.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> In his lucid and moving Encyclical on the theological virtue of hope Pope Benedict XVI provides a trenchant rebuttal of Marx and atheism, which offer illusory hopes that rest purely on human effort and aim for an unattainable goal of achieving a paradise on earth. See “Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on Christian Hope. Benedict XVI, nos. 20, 21 and 36, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html) (accessed 11 January 2008). Earlier, John Paul II noted that “the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism.” See “*Centesimus Annus*”: *On the Hundreth Anniversary of “Rerum Novarum,”* Australian Edition, no. 13 (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 1991) 29.

<sup>348</sup> For John Paul II, Christian humanism “implies first of all an openness to the transcendent,” and “advocates a vision of society centered on the human person and his inalienable rights, on the values of justice and peace, on a correct relationship between individuals, society and the state, on the logic of solidarity and subsidiarity.” Quoted by J. Michael Miller, “Three Megatrends Influencing Catholic Higher Education Globally,” *Origins* 36:36 (22 February 2007) 570.

<sup>349</sup> John Paul II notes that “after the Second World War, she [the church] put the dignity of the person at the centre of her social messages” (“*Centesimus Annus*”: *On the Hundreth Anniversary of “Rerum Novarum,”* Australian Edition, no. 61 [Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 1991] 108). In *Catholic Social Ethics*, one of the pre-papal works, John Paul II “saw Communism less as an enemy than as a misunderstanding—a misdirected turn towards a false conception of the world and humanity. To correct any mistake, one had first to understand it, to turn its illusory values into real ones.” Cited by Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, “John Paul’s Debt to Marxism,” *The Tablet* (14 January 2006) 5. Benedict XVI observes that “the Marxist system, where it found its way into government, not only left a sad heritage of economic and ecological destruction, but also a painful destruction of the human spirit” (“Belief Beyond the Political,” *The Tablet* [19 May 2007] 16). He is convinced that “respect for the person promotes peace and that, in building peace, the foundations are laid for an authentic integral humanism” (“Respect for Rights of All,” *The Tablet* [30 December 2006] 37). For Robert J. Schreier, “As a *description* of systems of oppression, Marxism has much to teach. As a *prescription* for a new society, it is no longer likely to find many adherents. And...dialectical thinking itself has become questionable.” See (*The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*, The Boston Theological Institute Series, vol. 3 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997) 102.



The ensemble of the VEC's pastoral letters, especially those issued in 1980 and 2001, presents an ecclesiology and a theology of the laity that are fundamentally Christological and missionary. Such a theology is in the first place meant to be an inspirational resource for the Vietnamese faithful themselves. But it also intends to send a clear message to the political authorities of the Church's unique contribution to the socio-political order.<sup>350</sup> This message is based on her incarnational vision of the dignity and intrinsic value of the human person.<sup>351</sup> From this derives the necessity of religious freedom and the promotion of human rights.<sup>352</sup> This message is after all a reminder to all people of good will that to ignore God is to find human endeavours drifting into meaninglessness.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Bryan Hehir notes that as a result of Vatican II, "the Catholic Church became less political and more social: less political in the sense that the document on religious liberty cut the Church free from many relationships with states that kept it in thrall to state power; more social in that the Church, free politically, could now be more deeply involved in the social arena" ("Wanted: A New Global Order," *The Tablet* [1 December 2001] 1701). We argue that the position of the bishops of Vietnam on the Church's mission in Vietnam is in agreement with teaching of the universal magisterium as explained by Leslie Griffin: "the Church's mission is described as a *religious* one, the salvation of souls, although that salvation always involves some concern for the material well-being of Christians and for the moral life. The Church's *competence* is a *moral* and *religious* one.... The laity's sphere of competence is the secular world, including the political arena." See "The Integration of Spiritual and Temporal: Contemporary Roman Catholic Church-State Theory," *Theological Studies* 48 (1987) 248.

<sup>351</sup> John Paul II also articulated this point clearly by affirming that the Church's "contribution to the political order is precisely her vision of the dignity of the person revealed in all its fullness in the mystery of the Incarnate Word." See *Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Hundreth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*, no 47 (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 1991) 89.

<sup>352</sup> For John Paul II, "the yearning for freedom of religion cannot be suppressed: As long as human beings are alive, it will always by present and pressing." See "The Great Challenges Facing Humanity Today: Address to Diplomatic Corps," *Origins* 34:31 (20 January, 2005) 499. In his view, "at the very heart of human freedom is the right to religious freedom since it deals with man's most fundamental relationship: his relationship with God." Ibid. John Courtney Murray highlights three doctrinal tenets of Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*): "religious freedom is a human right (personal and collective); the function and right of the state in religious matters is limited; and the freedom of the Church is the fundamental principle defining the relations between the Church and the sociopolitical order." See J.N Moody and Eds., "Church and State Since 1789," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003) 643.

<sup>353</sup> See *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 30: "Once God is forgotten, the creature is lost sight of as well." In his opening address to the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in May 2007 Pope Benedict XVI echoes this view stating that "where God is absent—God with the human face of Jesus Christ," human values "fail to show themselves with their full force, nor does a consensus arise concerning them." See Benedict XVI, "Belief Beyond the Political," *The Tablet* (19 May 2007) 16. In an address to the Extraordinary Consistory of Cardinals in 1991, the then Cardinal Ratzinger stated even more forcefully that "the ultimate root of hatred for human life, of all attacks on human life, is the loss of God. Where God disappears, the absolute dignity of human life disappears as well" ("The Problem of Threats to Human Life," *L'Osservatore Romano* 14 [8 April 1991] 3).

**CHAPTER 10**  
**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**  
**THE FUTURE OF THE FABC'S THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY**

As this thesis comes to its conclusion, it would be worthwhile to recall what prompted our journey of research in the first place and where we have come in this exploration. This study set out to examine the role of the laity in the contextual theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (1970-2001) with special reference to Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici* (1989) and *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), and the pastoral letters of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference. Throughout this study a twofold question has constantly been raised—has there been a development in the FABC's theology of the laity, and to what extent does this theology represent an integration of, and a step beyond, other postconciliar theologies of the laity? In the course of responding to this question, we have considered the entire corpus of the FABC, all relevant material produced by John Paul II, the pastoral letters of the VEC, in particular those issued between 1980 and 2001, and other literature that deals with the question of the laity and its underlying ecclesiological framework. Given the scope of this study and the period of the development of these theologies, the methodology employed has been at the same time diachronic and synchronic, critical, analytical, and comparative.

Three general observations emerged from our investigation of this topic. First, there is both a fundamental continuity and a gradual development in the Asian bishops' theology of the laity, which was formulated in tandem with their ecclesiology from 1970 to 2001. This theology of the Church developed according to a similar trajectory to the theology of the laity, marked, as it was, by basic continuity and gradual change in response to the changing situations in Asia.

Secondly, to better explicate the FABC's theology of the laity and to highlight its distinctive features we have compared it with the theologies crafted by John Paul II and the Vietnamese bishops. These three theologies were developed concurrently but at various levels and in different contexts: the Pope's proceeding at the global level of the universal Church, the FABC's at the continental level with the Asian context as its theological locus, and the VEC's at the national level of the local Church in Vietnam.

Our comparative analysis shows that the FABC's theology of the laity integrates the major themes and fundamental tenets of the teachings of John Paul II and the Vietnamese bishops, in particular the emphasis on the mission of the Church and the laity as proclamation, witness of life, and triple dialogue, coupled with a spirituality of discipleship expressed in a life of love, service, and solidarity. It also encompasses the motifs of other postconciliar theologies emanating from other parts of the world, e.g., the focus on liberation and the preferential option for the poor in Latin America, the accentuation on the inculturation of faith in African theologies, and the pressing concern of Western theologies with interfaith dialogue.

Thirdly, we have demonstrated that, by maintaining both the contextual character and the universalising dimension, the FABC's theology of the laity represents a step beyond other postconciliar theologies of the laity including those of John Paul II and the Vietnamese bishops. This assertion is based on our observation that the theology of the Asian bishops straddles both the local and the global spheres. As a contextual theology it begins with the local context and arrives at a robust description of the laity as Asian Christians. This articulation of the identity of lay people retrieves the original understanding of the followers of Christ as disciples, a conception that existed at the time of the New Testament and the Church of the first and second centuries when there was as yet no distinction between the laity and the clergy. It also brings into bold relief the historical, concrete and existential dimensions of the life of Asian Christians in Asia, and suggests that their vocation and mission is fundamentally the same as that of the entire Church in Asia. The universal appeal of the theology of the FABC, on the other hand, is due mainly to the fact that the questions it raises and the theological responses it proposes deal with global, contemporary issues facing the whole Church. Indeed, the FABC's theology of triple dialogue has offered fresh ideas to address at least three current global trends in society. These are: the revolution in communications technologies which blurs the cultures and spurs local communities to search for their own, distinct cultural identity; the increasingly open conflicts between followers of different religions which highlight the urgent need for interreligious dialogue; and finally the inexorable

advance of globalisation,<sup>1</sup> which leaves in its aftermath the poverty and oppression of the masses, and calls for the commitment to human development, the preferential option for the poor, and the promotion of social harmony. By adopting an integrated approach to proclamation, witness of life, and triple dialogue, the FABC's theology, which places the kingdom of God at the centre of the life and mission of Church, offers innovative insights that can help other local Churches in other parts of the world in their efforts to deal with issues confronting them in the third millennium.

This study consists of three parts besides an introduction (Chapter 1) and a conclusion (Chapter 10). In the first part we examine the question of the laity and lay ministry throughout the history of the Church (Chapter 2) and provide an analysis of the theological methodologies adopted by the FABC (Chapter 3). Building on this historical and methodological framework, the second part investigates (Chapter 4) and reviews (Chapter 5) the theology of the laity in the documents of the FABC issued between 1970 and 2001. This is followed by an exposition (Chapter 6) and a critique

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<sup>1</sup> T. Howland Sanks reminds us that "as recently as 1979, when Karl Rahner offered his now famous theological analysis of Vatican II as the emergence of the global Church, the term 'globalization' was hardly in use" ("Globalization and the Church's Social Mission," *Theological Studies* 60 [1999] 625). Following Roland Robertson and Peter Beyer, Robert J. Schreiter defines globalisation as "the extension of the effects of modernity to the entire world, and the compression of time and space, all occurring at the same time" (*The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997] 8). He notes that "'globalization' is the generic term in English (*mondialisation* is preferred in French and some other languages) for the world order that appears to be taking place" ("Globalization and Reconciliation," in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001] 125). For John Paul II, "one of the Church's concerns about globalization is that it has quickly become a cultural phenomenon. The market as an exchange mechanism has become the medium of a new culture.... The market imposes its way of thinking and acting, and stamps its scale of values upon behaviour. Those who are subjected to it often see globalization as a destructive flood threatening the social norms which had protected them and the cultural points of reference which had given them direction in life" ("Towards a Common Ethical Code for Humankind: *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences 2001*," *Concilium* 4 [2001] 12). Hans Küng observes that "in China the term 'globalization' (like the term 'capitalism' previously), has predominantly negative connotations and is identified with Americanization and Western domination which destroy a people's own culture and tradition" ("Global Business and the Global Ethic," *Concilium* 4 [2001] 87). Kenneth R. Himes suggests that whereas in the past Catholic social teaching "had been primarily directed to issues of economics and secondarily of politics, the new context of globalization will force the tradition to attend more to issues of culture and identity" ("Globalization with a Human Face: Catholic Social Teaching and Globalization," *Theological Studies* 69 [2008] 281). It is also instructive to recall some of the insightful remarks made by Vincent J. Miller on three cultural effects of globalisation: "Homogenization is the most popularly understood of globalization's cultural impacts. It describes globalization as the imposition of a single culture," because "globalization erodes local cultures, replacing them with either some version of Western culture or a global consumer culture"; "Heterogenization fosters a cultural ecology where communities close in on themselves" and people are encouraged "to think of themselves as members of distinct cultures and to join together in ever purer, smaller cultural units"; "Deterritorialization intensifies heterogenization" as "mediated culture, easy travel and migration, and choice of community unbind culture from geographical space." See Vincent J. Miller, "Where is the Church? Globalization and Catholicity," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 412-3.

(Chapter 7) of this theology's underlying ecclesiological foundations. In the third and concluding part we compare and contrast the FABC's theology of the laity with those of Pope John Paul II (Chapter 8) and the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (Chapter 9).

### **10.1 Summary of the Findings**

In the first, opening chapter we look at the rediscovery of the importance of the laity in the Asian Church, review the state of the question, and highlight the significance and major contributions of the thesis. We argue that the rediscovery of the status and mission of lay people in the Asian Church emanates from the Copernican revolution in the theology of the laity initiated at Vatican II, a theological event that the Church in Asia experienced as a catalyst for ecclesial change.

Chapter 2 reviews the laity question in history by examining the status, vocation, and mission of lay people in the documents of Vatican II, and also in the periods before and after the Council. We pay particular attention to the postconciliar theologies of the laity according to Yves Congar and Leonard Doohan, and survey the changing meaning of the terms ministry and lay ministry.

Chapter 3 discusses the theological methodologies of the FABC and their characteristics. It suggests that these methodological approaches are based on a basic framework of "see, judge, act," and contends that the theology of the Asian bishops, in particular their theology of the laity, is fundamentally a contextual theology, a faith seeking triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. Chapters 2 and 3 together set the stage and provide a theological springboard for an exploration of the FABC's theology of the laity in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4 examines the features of the FABC's theology of the laity and contends that there is both fundamental continuity and gradual development in this theology from 1970 to 2001. The key elements of this theology include a description of lay people as Asian Christians based on their common, baptismal priesthood of life and their special presence to the world, an explication of their vocation as a call to a contextualised communion with Jesus, an articulation of their mission that is Christ-centred,

kingdom-focused, world-oriented, dialogical, and liberative, and finally, a spirituality that is defined primarily as a spirituality of discipleship and a spirituality of daily life. The development of this theology follows a trajectory that is characterised by an increased emphasis on world-orientation, a geographical contextualisation of the role of lay people, an empowerment of the laity, an integral formation *of* and *for* the laity, and lastly an investigation of a spirituality of harmony.

Chapter 5 reviews the FABC's theology of the laity and contends that it has a contextual and relational dimension, which is implicit in the concept of the priesthood of life. This concept together with the notion of contextualised communion is central to the identity, vocation, mission, and spirituality of lay people in Asia, described first and foremost as Asian Christians. This theology also suggests that the vocation and mission of the laity are developed from the concept of the priesthood of life, and while evangelisation occupies the highest priority in the ministries of lay people, it is the kingdom of God that is the ultimate goal of all these activities. The key tenets of this theology are contained in the final statements of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC held in 1986, the structure of which is based on an epistemological perspective and a hermeneutical approach that are distinctively Asian. While the strength of this theology lies in its contextual and relational character, certain limitations can be identified, namely a lack of emphasis on the universal call to holiness, a concept that is central to *Lumen Gentium* and *Christifideles Laici*, and the blurring of the lay-cleric distinction in the role of the Asian laity in the world.

Chapter 6 analyses the features of the FABC's theology of the Church as the underlying context for the lay vocation and mission, and argues that there is both fundamental continuity and gradual development in the FABC's ecclesiology from 1970 to 2001. This ecclesiology focuses on the kingdom of God and provides an understanding of the Church as communion-in-mission, as dialogue and solidarity, as disciple-community, and finally as basic ecclesial communities. The combination of these ecclesiological models represents a new way of being Church in Asia.

Chapter 7 explores the ecclesiological foundations of the FABC's theology of the laity noting the concurrent development from 1970 to 2001 between the FABC's theology of the laity and its ecclesiology. Both of these theologies are essentially

contextual and relational. We also suggest that the Asian bishops have developed their initial conception of the Church as a community of faith in Asia into a matrix of theological models, according to which the Church is called to become a community of faith, hope, and charity in Asia, realised in basic ecclesial communities. This ecclesiology from below, which proceeds from a Christological, pneumatological, and Trinitarian basis, rests on the two ecclesiological pillars of communion and mission. It privileges basic ecclesial communities as a theological locus to integrate the Church's universal, local, and eschatological elements by emphasising their sacramental and regnocentric dimensions.

Chapter 8 examines Pope John Paul II's theology of the laity in his Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici* (1989) and *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999) with reference to the documents of the FABC, and argues that this theology is based on the baptismal identity and dignity of Christians. As a reflection on the three motifs of vocation, communion, and mission, rooted in the teachings of Vatican II and the 1985 Synod of Bishops, *Christifideles Laici* focuses on the role of lay Christians from a predominantly Trinitarian and ecclesiological perspective, and, aiming at a universal audience, it pays less attention to the social and cultural context of local Churches. Here we offer four observations relating to the question of the laity. First, John Paul II uses the concept of baptismal dignity as the framework and leitmotif to define the vocation and mission of lay people. Secondly, for him, communion ecclesiology is the context for understanding the role of the laity. Thirdly, the universal call to holiness lies at the heart of this papal document, as it does in *Lumen Gentium*. Finally, while the Pope occasionally provides a positive definition of the laity as Christians, in the main he prefers to maintain a clear distinction between the ordained and lay people.

In *Ecclesia in Asia* the Pope provides a Christological and pneumatological interpretation of the mission of the entire Church in Asia, including the laity. Expressing this mission as proclamation, inculturation, communion, dialogue, and human promotion, he underscores the distinctive role of lay people, in particular women, the family, and young people, as missionaries and witnesses in the world of Asia. Here we make three observations. First, it is the logic of faith as gift and evangelisation as task that underlines and unifies the entire Apostolic Exhortation. Secondly, the term "witness of life" or its variants is a comprehensive concept that

John Paul II employs to described and prescribe the identity and role of the laity in Asia. As a concrete expression of the integration of faith, proclamation, and Christian living, this notion lies at the heart of the papal document and succinctly summarises its theology of the laity. Thirdly, the identity, the vocation, and the ministry of lay people are understood only in the context of the Church as a witnessing community of faith, built on the two pillars of communion and mission.

This chapter proposes a new way of interpreting John Paul II's theology of mission, one that is based on a distinction between, on the one hand, the theological firmness (*fortiter*) with which he imposes compliance with the principle of proclamation and, on the other, the pastoral flexibility (*suaviter*) that he encourages in the practice of triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. This chapter concludes that, except for some minor difference in the interpretation of the identity and role of lay people in the Asian Church, there is a substantial convergence between the theologies of the laity according to the Pope and the Asian bishops.

Chapter 9 investigates the theology of the laity in the pastoral letters of the VEC with a focus on those issued between 1980 and 2001, and with reference to the teachings of John Paul II and the Asian bishops. This contextual and relational theology emphasises the centrality of the human person, and articulates the relationship of the Church and the laity with Vietnamese society as the mission of love and service, and the commitment to solidarity, mission *ad extra*, witness of life, and sanctification. We argue that this theology and its ecclesiological framework are underpinned by an anthropological orientation that is Christocentric, and that the richest legacy of the pastoral letters is the presentation of Jesus Christ as the foundation and purpose of the vocation and mission of the Church and the Vietnamese lay faithful.

The VEC's theology of the Church and of the laity also draws heavily on the insights of Paul VI, John Paul II, and the Asian bishops. We note that "triple dialogue" is for the FABC's theology of the laity what "sacramental dignity" is for John Paul II, and "love and service" for the VEC. However, with the advent of the Synod for Asia, the promulgation of John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, and the increased participation of the Vietnamese bishops in the meetings and activities of the FABC, the VEC's theology has become more aligned with the thoughts of both John



Paul II and the Asian bishops, who teach that the mission of the Church in Asia has as its key elements proclamation, witness of life, and the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the people of Asia, especially the poor, those afflicted by a reality that includes the economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of life.

In Chapter 10, this concluding chapter, we provide a summary of the findings and make some suggestions as to the possible directions of the FABC's theology of the laity. In doing so we will situate the development of this theology from 1970 to 2001 in the global context of society, highlight some of the salient shifts in the contexts of mission facing both the universal Church and the Church in Asia, review the mindsets that govern much of the current thinking on the question of the laity, and suggest that a paradigm shift is required to resolve the simmering tension between the role of the clergy and the rise of the laity in the Asian Church.

## **10.2 The Future of the FABC's Theology of the Laity**

Before venturing into any prognosis for the future we need to situate the FABC's theology of the laity within the larger context of its development between 1970 and 2001. In retrospect, there is little doubt that as a result of a sustained interaction with the local settings over this period of time, and partly in response to the universalising theologies of the West, which did not take up issues that were most pressing to the cultural, religious, and social situations of Asia, the Asian bishops have developed their own theologies, including their theology of the laity, to address issues that pertain to the identity and mission of the Church in Asia, a continent marked by a diversity of cultures, a plurality of religions, and the massive poverty of the majority of its population. Like any local theologies, the FABC's theology of the laity bears the marks of the times in which it was developed. In terms of its time span, it seems to overlap with the last two of the three phases of missionary activities suggested by Robert Schreiter.<sup>2</sup> The dominant image of the society in the second phase between

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<sup>2</sup> Robert J. Schreiter suggests that "there are three discernible periods in those five hundred years of history of the Church's mission": the period of expansion (1492-1945), the period of solidarity (1945-1989), and the period of globalisation (1989- ). See *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997) 122, 123-7; see also "The Theological Meaning of a Truly Catholic Church," *New Theology Review* 7 (November 1994) 10-13.

1945 and 1989 was growth and development.<sup>3</sup> It was “the period of the bipolar world of the Cold War, of capitalism versus socialism, with the poor majority of the world’s peoples oscillating between the two,”<sup>4</sup> and the Church’s theological response was its mission of solidarity, understood as “dialogue, inculturation, and liberation – three forms of solidarity.”<sup>5</sup> The third period, which commenced with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, is marked by the emblematic concepts of global capitalism and communication, and calls for “a renewed and expanded concept of catholicity,”<sup>6</sup> understood as the extension of the Church throughout the world, fullness of faith, and exchange and communication, as a theological response of the Church to the challenge of globalisation.<sup>7</sup> Schreiter suggests that the mode of mission in this phase would be the elaboration of a praxis around one of the themes of “new humanity, genuine peace [and] reconciliation as a new creation.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997) 125.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 124-5.

<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *ibid.*, 126. For him, these three forms of mission, along with proclamation, emerged “out of the 1981 SEDOS Seminar in Rome.” See footnote 12, *ibid.* For a detailed discussion of these missionary activities see *Mission in Dialogue: the Sedos Research Seminar on the Future of Mission March 8-19, 1981, Rome, Italy*, edited by Joseph Lang and Mary Motte (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982) 634. At the SEDOS seminar held in April 2000 he reiterates this observation and contends that “mission for Roman Catholics after the Second Vatican Council and after the end of colonial empires took on a strong sense of the *accompaniment* of people through dialogue, inculturation, and the liberation of the poor.” See “Mission in the Third Millennium,” in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001) 155. In Schreiter’s view, “while this sense of accompaniment did not supersede earlier notions of mission as proclamation and development through education and healthcare, there was a resounding different tone set in the second half of the twentieth century.” *Ibid.* We simply note here that proclamation and these three modes of mission had already been discussed in depth at the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC, held in Taipei in 1974. See FABC I, arts. 6-28, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13-6.

<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *ibid.*, 127.

<sup>7</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *ibid.*, 128-32.

<sup>8</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *ibid.*, 131. Schreiter argues that “in a globalizing world that cannot thematize its own *telos*,” “the fullness of faith offers a number of theological *teloi* for a guiding vision of humanity and society”: one is a new theological anthropology, based on Genesis 1:26, that articulates “the full dignity of all human beings in a world that drives many of them deeper into misery”; the second involves “the possibility of an ontology of peace to counteract the centrifugal tendencies of globalization”; the third derives from the Pauline vision of reconciliation as the ‘new creation’ (2 Cor 5:17).” See *ibid.*, 43, 131, and also 113. For Schreiter, the Christian understanding of reconciliation as God’s reconciling the world “could well provide both the resources and the very paradigm for a theology and spirituality of mission encountering a world marked by globalization” (“Globalization and Reconciliation,” in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001] 60, 142).

On the scale of history the thirty-one years of the development of the FABC's theology of the laity from 1970 to 2001 is quite a short time, however long this period may have seemed to those directly engaged in its articulation. While some scholars might contend that this theology was not given the time necessary to mature, we argue that the FABC has already laid a solid theological foundation, and this theology may be on the cusp of moving into a new stage of development, which centres on the search for a stronger sense of Catholic identity in the world of Asia.<sup>9</sup> Some of the global trends that have affected the Asian Church and will spur further this theological development include the rise of globalisation,<sup>10</sup> the coincidence of religion and violence,<sup>11</sup> the secularisation of society, the rise of Islam, and the erosion of the environment.<sup>12</sup> To these we might add the biotech revolution and the pervasiveness of the wireless world.<sup>13</sup> These global shifts in the contexts of mission,

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<sup>9</sup> In his first press conference the day after he was elected to be the sixth general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev Dr Samuel Kobia observes that "the twentieth century was dominated by the politics of ideology. It is likely that the twenty-first will be dominated by the politics of identity. Many people define their identity in a religious way. If we are to overcome violence and create peace and justice, we need a multi-faith approach." See G. Gispert-Sauch, "The New Protestant 'Pope'," *Vidyajyoti* 67:10 (October 2003) 854.

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Waters observes that "just as postmodernism was *the* concept of the 1980s, globalization may be *the* concept, the key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium" (*Globalization*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [London: Routledge, 2001] 1). The author traces the main path of globalisation through time in three arenas, the economy, the polity, and culture, and notes that "economies trend towards marketization," "polities trend towards liberalization and democratization," and "culture trends towards universalization, the abstraction of values and standards to a very high level of generality that will permit extreme levels of cultural differentiation." See *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> For Emilio Platti, there is a shift in emphasis from the "Class of Civilizations" to the "Class of Theologies," and "the world is split...along religious fault lines." See Anthony O'Mahony, "Into the Age of Uncertainty," *The Tablet* (19 July 2008) 4; see also Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer 1993) 22-49.

<sup>12</sup> These five shifts in context, which received special attention during the SEDOS Congress held in April 2000 in Rome, were summarised by Robert J. Schreiter in "Mission in the Third Millennium," in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 149-52.

<sup>13</sup> In 2008, Gartner researchers identify seven major trends in information technologies (IT) that are "wide-ranging and affect every organization to some extent": "Green IT," "The Consumerization of IT," "Alternative Acquisition and Delivery Models" [i.e., focusing on business outcomes rather than use of IT], "Cloud Computing" [i.e., delivering services across the Internet to multiple customers], "The Modernization of IT," "IT That Matters" [i.e., "IT investments can create, expand and protect an enterprise's strategic competitive advantages], and "The Business Impact of Social Computing" [i.e., IT plays "a critical role in shaping the behavior and activities of people, enterprises and industries"]. See Stephen Prentice et al., "2008 Research Themes Summary," Gartner Research (6 March 2008), ID Number G00154624.

together with the advent of postmodernism,<sup>14</sup> the collapse of the metanarratives that had bound cultures, religions, and nations, and the sustained deconstruction that characterises the current conversation about religions,<sup>15</sup> will push the FABC's theology, in particular its theology of the laity, into uncharted waters. While no one can accurately predict the direction of this vast and continually developing topic, an ambitious project that is well beyond the scope of this present study, we wish to offer here some suggestions as to its possible pathways in the future.

### 10.2.1 Possible Directions for the FABC's Theology of the Laity

One possible direction for the FABC is to undertake a new comprehensive analysis of these global trends and assess their impact on the local Churches in Asia. This analytical exercise corresponds to the "see" phase, the first moment of the contextual methodology of the theology of the Asian bishops that we have discussed in Chapter

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<sup>14</sup> For Stanley J. Grenz, "The term *postmodern* may first have been coined in the 1930s to refer to a major historical transition already underway and as the designation for certain developments in the arts. But postmodernism did not gain widespread attention until the 1970s. First it denotes a new style of architecture.... Eventually it surfaced as the description for a broader cultural phenomenon. Whatever else it might be, as the name suggests, postmodernism signifies the quest to move beyond modernism" (*A Primer on Postmodernism* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996] 2). Grenz further notes that "scholars disagree among themselves as to what postmodernism involves, but they have reached a consensus on one point: this phenomenon marks the end of a single, universal worldview. The postmodern ethos resists unified, all-encompassing, and universally valid explanations." *Ibid.*, 11-2. It is worth noting that the term postmodernism was only widely used in the intellectual world subsequent to the release of a report commissioned by the Conseil des Universités of the Government of Quebec in 1979. This report aims to study "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies," and Jean-François Lyotard "decided to use the word *postmodern* to describe that condition." See *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Translation from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Foreword by Fredric Jameson, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 10 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) xxiii. Michael Paul Gallagher notes that "there is a tendency to use 'postmodernism' for the more *intellectual* school of thinking associated with Lyotard or Derrida, or even tracing its origins as far back as Nietzsche, and then to reserve 'postmodernity' for a wider *cultural* context that includes ways of life as well as forms of thinking.... The two realities are not completely separate" (*Clashing Symbols* [London, Longman and Todd, 1997] 87). Peter Feldmeier describes the key features of the term *postmodern* as follows: "First, postmodernity means that we live in an age of heightened historical consciousness.... Second, our age is particularly suspicious of a *classisist* notion of knowing or of having privileged access to truth.... Third, postmodernity argues that we must take the other as truly other, as expressing a very different version of reality.... Finally, we live in a world of such cultural and religious diversity that universal truth claims themselves are either challenged by definition or at least put into a context that is wary of top-down dogmas." "Is the Theology of Religions an Exhausted Project?" *Horizons* 35:2 (Fall 2008) 263.

<sup>15</sup> The authors of a recent report in *The Economist* note that "for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century religion was banished from politics. For most elites, God had been undone by Darwin, dismissed by Marx, deconstructed by Freud. Stalin forcibly ejected Him, but in much of western Europe there was no need for force: religion had been on the slide for centuries." See "In God's Name: a Special Report on Religion and Public Life," *The Economist* (3 November 2007) 4.

3. It is a holistic endeavour to take into account the location of its context within the global society, and also a *sine qua non* for crafting a more relevant theology *of and for* the Asian laity. As such it may call for a fresh articulation of the role of the Church and of the laity in the postmodern world of Asia.

Within the ambit of the “judge” or doctrinal phase, the second moment of their theological methodology, we suggest four interrelated topics that the bishops of Asia could further develop to enrich their theology of the laity. These include an emphasis on the theme of *missio Dei*, an exploration of the conception of the Church as a structured or ordered *communio*, a consideration of lay functions and lay repositioning from the perspective of “ordered ministries,” and a deepening of a theology of the laity anchored in the sacrament of baptism. These proposed areas of theological reflection warrant further clarification.

Our first suggestion has to do with the theme of *missio Dei*,<sup>16</sup> a rich and profound theological concept that has not received sufficient attention from the FABC.<sup>17</sup> While the idea of the mission of God is clearly manifested in their discussion of the Trinitarian dimension of the mission of the Asian Church,<sup>18</sup> the terms *missio Dei* and “mission of God” are not listed in the indices of their three-volume collection covering the official documents issued between 1970 and 2001. This concept emphasises that mission is not primarily an activity of the Church, but is first and foremost the work of the Trinity who initiates it. Mission belongs to the nature of the triune God who loves the world, and the Church is simply called to participate in it.

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<sup>16</sup> The term *missio Dei* “came into currency in the 1930s,” and “Karl Barth was one of the first to use the term.” Robert J. Schreiter, “Mission in the Third Millennium,” *Mission in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 155. David J. Bosch notes that until the sixteenth century, the term “mission” was used “exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, of the sending of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son” (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991] 1). This classical doctrine was “expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.” See *ibid.*, 390. In Bosch’s view, “the recognition that mission is God’s mission represents a crucial breakthrough in respect of the preceding centuries,” and “it is inconceivable that we could again revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission.” *Ibid.* 393.

<sup>17</sup> The FABC seems to employ the term *missio Dei* only once. See “Consultation on Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad Gentes*: A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia,” art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 222.

<sup>18</sup> FABC V, arts. 3.1-3.2.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279-81.

God is missionary because God is love. As the people of God, the Church must also be missionary. In this sense, the mission to further the kingdom of God on earth is the *raison d'être* and the most important duty of the whole Church including the laity. Therefore, it would be fruitful if the Asian bishops could retrieve the original meaning of this theological concept, and further explore its implications and applications for the Church in Asia. Such a rediscovery would avoid the danger of an overemphasis on the horizontal, functional understanding of mission as a series of functions and activities, and encourage all the faithful to embrace an eschatological humility appropriate to a pilgrim Church and to place more reliance on the grace of God in the furtherance of the kingdom of God in Asia. It could also counter a perennial temptation that sees mission purely in terms of visible outcomes, results, and numbers. The emphasis on the *missio Dei* and on the Church's participation in the work of God in no way advocates or represents a retreat from the drive and dynamism of the missionary activities of the Church. Rather, this recovery aims to underscore the vertical dimension in mission and provides a Trinitarian perspective to all these missionary elements.

The retrieval of the original meaning of the concept *missio Dei* together with the bishops' accentuation of the kingdom of God, a concept that lies at the heart of the ecclesiology of the Asian bishops, would also show that it is not exhausted by an explication of the primacy of proclamation and witness, or an elaboration of the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor, the key tenets of the FABC's theology of mission. In Asia, where Christians are likely to remain a very small minority in the foreseeable future, a focus on the *missio Dei* would serve as a constant reminder to the entire Church, especially the laity, that it is the triune God who is the author and the main agent of mission, and they are simply unworthy labourers in God's vineyard. Like Paul and Apollos, the Church can sow the seed and water the plant, but it is God who makes it grow.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See 1 Cor 3:6.

The second focus that we propose relates to the theme of the Church as a *structured communio*,<sup>20</sup> or as an ordered communion.<sup>21</sup> This concept has not been discussed by the FABC. As explicated by Walter Kasper, the expression *communio* encompasses five meanings.<sup>22</sup> In Kasper's view, fellowship with God represents the most fundamental aspect of *communio*, a concept that can also be understood as participation in the life of God through word and sacrament, as an ecclesial unity in communion, as communion of the faithful expressed by the participation and co-responsibility of all, and finally as the communion of the Church as sacrament for the world.<sup>23</sup> The concept of the Church as a *structured communio* incorporates the meaning of the term *communio hierarchia*,<sup>24</sup> an ecclesiological phrase that was coined by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to hold in tension both the papal and the episcopal elements, and to highlight "the essential organic expression of the essential structure of the church, its unity in catholicity, and its catholicity in unity."<sup>25</sup> However, the term *structured communio* expresses better the reality of ecclesial communion as it maintains the full intent of the phrase *communio hierarchia*, but avoids the explicit reference to the term "hierarchy," a category that has often been

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<sup>20</sup> Ladislav Orsy explains this *structured communio* as follows: "Initially through the sacraments of initiation and the reception of God's word, all the faithful are united in a mysterious way. Then, within this fundamental unity, through the sacrament of orders another *communio* emerges, that of the servant-leaders who are given the privilege to be qualified witnesses of God's revelation and to serve and govern with power the people. Finally, from early times a special type of *communio* emerged in the church, that of 'religious' or 'consecrated' communities. While their origins are not in a sacrament, they are the fruits of the Spirit" ("The Church of the Third Millennium," in *Common Calling: The Laity and Governance of the Catholic Church*, edited by Stephen J. Pope [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004] 235). For Orsy, *structured communio* is a better expression than "hierarchical communion" as the latter term does not speak of service. *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Gaillardetz prefers to refer to the Church as an "ordered communion." See "The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion," in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) 31.

<sup>22</sup> For a helpful discussion of this phrase see Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1989) 156-61. Francis George notes that the word *communio* appears 285 times in the documents of Vatican II, but this fact is not immediately evident because it is translated into English by different terms such as fellowship, community, and fraternity. See "The Parish in the Mission of the Church," *Chicago Studies* 46:1 (Spring 2007) 24.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1989) 148-165.

<sup>24</sup> The term "hierarchical communion" occurs five times in the documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 21, 22; *Christus Dominus*, nos. 4, 5; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 7. As an adjective, "hierarchical" means "by divine order." As a noun, "hierarchy" comes from two Greek words which mean "sacred source," "sacred origin," or "sacred principle."

<sup>25</sup> Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1989) 160.

associated with the concept of “domination.”<sup>26</sup> Francis A. Sullivan reminds us that “hierarchical authority is related to ecclesial communion as means to end: it exists to promote and maintain ecclesial communion.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, an emphasis by the FABC on the Church as a *structured communio* would continue to affirm the importance of the hierarchy in promoting and preserving the unity of the Church, and at the same time, underscore the fact that hierarchy and leadership are enriched by the full participation and inclusion of the whole people of God including lay people.

An ecclesiology that is based on the framework of *structured communio* will seek to explore the implications of this concept as it is adopted as the best existential expression of the very nature of the Church as mystery. One of the outcomes of this ecclesiological approach, and the theology of the laity that flows from it, is that the unity of all the faithful is ensured while the ecclesial diversity in unity is fostered and encouraged. It would also affirm that the ordained and religious are defined primarily by their relationships to other members of the Church rather than simply through their possession of special powers or charisms. The theological meaning of a *structured communio*, coupled with the conciliar concept of the Church as the people of God, could serve as a basis and a catalyst for a structural reform at the local level of the Church in Asia to strengthen and expand the role of the laity and empower them to participate more actively in the life and mission of the Church.

The concept of the Church as a *structured communio* is linked intimately to the theme of “ordered” ministries, the third focus that we suggest that the Asian bishops could deepen to enrich their theology of the Church and of the laity. Like the concept of *structured communio*, this ecclesiological matrix preserves the unity of the community, encourages different ministries, and emphasises the fact that both forms of ministries, ordained and lay, “are essentially grounded in baptism and all the baptized share a common mission and common identity as the *Christifideles* before

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<sup>26</sup> Terence L. Nichols observes that “for authors such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Leonardo Boff, Sallie McFague, and others, hierarchy means domination *tout court*. The alternative to hierarchy, for these authors, is an egalitarian church.” See “Participatory Church,” in *Common Calling: The Laity and Governance of the Catholic Church*, edited by Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 112.

<sup>27</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, “Authority in an Ecclesiology of Communion,” *New Theology Review* 10 (1997) 24.



they are further specified by state of life and particular ministry.”<sup>28</sup> In this framework, one cannot discuss the ministry of the ordained or the lay ministry in isolation from the community and from each other.

Our fourth suggestion involves a deepening of a theology of the laity based on the sacraments of initiation,<sup>29</sup> in particular baptism—this theology being “one that situates distinctiveness within the identity and mission that all believers have in common.”<sup>30</sup>

A baptism-based theology of the laity, which flows from the ecclesiological vision of *Lumen Gentium*, will affirm first of all that baptism is the unifying factor for the

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<sup>28</sup> Susan K. Wood, “Conclusion,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) 260. For Richard Gaillardetz, “ordered church ministry is a reality broader than the ministry of the ordained (though inclusive of it) and narrower than Christian discipleship.” See “The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) 36. In Gaillardetz’s view, “in undertaking an ordered ministry, one is ecclesially re-positioned,” and this “new ecclesial relationship” is “subject to ecclesial discernment, formation, authorization, and ritualization.” *Ibid.*, 36, 48.

<sup>29</sup> According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law “the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the blessed Eucharist so complement one another that all three are required for full christian initiation.” See c. 842 §2, *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation*, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Can Law Society (London: HarperCollins, 1997) 196. John Paul II further explicates the interrelationship between the three sacraments: “The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet and king finds its source in the anointing of baptism, its further development in confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the holy eucharist” (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 14); see also John Paul II, “*Pastores Gregis*,” no. 38, *Origins* 33:22 (6 November 2003) 373. In 2007, Benedict XVI invited conferences of Catholic bishops to review the two sequences of the sacraments of initiation—confirmation preceding or following first communion, and established the centrality of the Eucharist as a new criterion for examination and determination of the issue. See “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Eucharist as Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission, [ 22 February 2007],” nos. 17-8, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis_en.html) (accessed 25 March 2008). Paul Turner summarises the history of the two practices as follows: “One, from local gatherings of bishops, favors the deferral of confirmation for its catechetical and inspirational value. Another, from Rome, favors the celebration of confirmation before first communion because of its historical and traditional value. Other arguments for celebrating confirmation before first communion could be advanced: to draw the practice between the Latin Rite closer to the Eastern Rites of the church, to unify the theology of the sacraments of initiation, and to release the tension over the age of confirmation in pastoral practice in the West” (“Benedict XVI and the Sequence of the Sacraments of Initiation,” *Worship* 82:2 [March 2008] 140). For Kurt Koch, “The renewal of the order of the sacraments of initiation is the condition *sine qua non* for the restoration of the ecclesial dimension of baptism” (“Principles for a Christian Theology of Baptism,” *Theology Digest* 52:3 [Fall 2005] 242).

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Ruddy, “Ecclesiological Issues Behind the Sexual Abuse Crisis,” *Origins* 37:8 (5 July 2007) 124. Ruddy argues that by referring to the lay-centred Church, one is simply replacing one dominant group with another. *Ibid.* See also Leonard Doohan, *The Lay-Centered Church: Theology and Spirituality* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1984).

Church as the people of God. It also serves as the foundation of the Christian community and offers a basis for a contextual articulation of the identity, role, and lifestyle of lay people. This baptism-centred theology is based upon the conviction that baptism is “the basis or matrix of all the Church’s ministries, be they lay or clerical,”<sup>31</sup> all baptised are called to one and the same holiness, and lay people share equally with the clergy the mission of the Church. This theological focus requires an increased emphasis on the ecclesiological model of co-discipleship, whereby all Christians, clergy, religious, and laity, are first and foremost the baptised, the Christian faithful, and the disciples of Christ. In this common matrix, all members of the Church share responsibility and participate in the same *missio Dei*.

We argue that an extensive and deeper treatment of these proposed theological foci would enrich the FABC’s theology of the laity in a number of ways. Firstly, the motif of *missio Dei* will serve as a constant reminder to Asian Christians that it is God who initiates the mission and that they simply participate in this mission of God. Therefore their minority status or the lack of a visible outcome should not be a cause for concern or leads them to despair, but rather increase their trust and confidence in God, who alone can further God’s kingdom. Second, the notion of the Church as a structured *communio* provides a solid ecclesiological basis for restructuring the ecclesial structure, a task that is so necessary if the laity are to assume a greater role in the Church. Thirdly, an ordered view of ministries would preserve the unity of the Church’s mission while encouraging the different charisms and ministries of the laity to flourish in response to the challenges of the times. Finally, a baptism-based theology of the laity will highlight the common core of the vocation and mission of all the faithful and foster better collaboration between the laity and the clergy. Following Avery Dulles who observes that the idea of communion was used at Vatican II “to revitalize the theology of the laity,”<sup>32</sup> we venture to suggest that the theme of the Church as a *structured communio*, coupled with the focus on the *missio Dei*, the concept of ordered ministries, and a theology of the laity that is fundamentally derived from baptism, can be further developed to renew the mission and ministry of Asian

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<sup>31</sup> Gerard Austin, “Baptism as the Matrix of Ministry,” *Louvain Studies* 23 (1998) 101.

<sup>32</sup> Avery Dulles, “The Church as Communion,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology*, edited by Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 132.

Christians in the third millennium. From this fourfold theological basis we propose four pastoral initiatives that the bishops of Asia might undertake to make their theology of the laity more relevant and fruitful. These practical suggestions correspond to the “Act” phase or the third moment of their theological methodology.

Firstly, the bishops of Asia could review the relevance and fitness for purpose of the oft-repeated term “triple dialogue,” a leitmotiv that has given their theological thinking a consistent unity, even though the primary intent of the term is pastoral and missionary. In the FABC statements, the term “dialogue” can mean either *dialogus* or *colloquium*, the two conciliar words that have often been translated as “dialogue” but do not necessarily mean the same thing.<sup>33</sup> At Vatican II, *dialogus* is used “whenever the Church is engaged in ecumenical talks or is proclaiming its mission.”<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, “when the process is one of interpersonal relationships,” or “whenever there are conversations and discussions which do not directly involve the Church hierarchy the word *colloquium* is used.”<sup>35</sup> In practice, in the mind of ordinary Asian Christians, the term dialogue tends to conjure up an image of exchanging ideas and viewpoints at an intellectual and theoretical level, or a structured conversation with agreed upon objectives and principles, an exchange that is often seen to be beyond the ken of the majority of lay people.<sup>36</sup> This term has also been considered to be “ideologically charged and therefore unhelpful.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, we suggest that the term “triple

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<sup>33</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the meaning of the term “dialogue” in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, see Ann Michele Nolan, *A Privileged Moment: “Dialogue” in the Language of the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965*, European University Studies, Series 23, Theology, vol. 829 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006). Nolan notes that “the word ‘dialogue’ is used fifty-four times in one English translation or another across the sixteen documents, with an entire section devoted to the concept in the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World.” See *ibid.*, 178.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>36</sup> Peter C. Phan observes that “in the West, especially in academic circles, the word ‘dialogue’ usually evokes images of a learned conversation among intellectuals at conferences and symposia.” See “Praying to the Buddha: Living Amid Religious Pluralism,” *Commonweal* 134:2 (26 January 2007), <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE> (accessed 21 February 2006), Gale Document Number: A159183041. The Economist notes that “if you gather a group of self-professed foreign-policy experts—whether they be neoconservatives, realpolitickers or urbane European diplomats—you can count on a sneer if you mention ‘interfaith dialogue’. At best, they say, it is liberal waffle; at worst it is naïve appeasement.” See “In God’s Name: a Special Report on Religion and Public Life,” *The Economist* (3 November 2007) 20.

<sup>37</sup> This assertion is attributed to John Allen by Timothy Radcliffe, “Overcoming Discord in the Church,” *National Catholic Reporter* (5 May 2006) 6. For John Allen, “In some Catholic circles, pleas

dialogue” be complemented by, and used interchangeably with, the phrase “triple engagement,” a term that in our view better embodies and expresses the orientation of the FABC’s theology. It reminds Asian Christians that a true dialogue should not remain at a purely theoretical or spiritual level, but has to be a concrete and sincere engagement and cooperation with others in pursuing the mission of building up the kingdom of justice, peace, and love.<sup>38</sup> This expression is more closely aligned with the contextual and relational character of the FABC’s overall theology because of its emphasis on the concrete, historical and existential engagement between Asian Christians and Asians. The Asian bishops could also expand their understanding of the triple dialogue to include a fourth type of dialogue, namely the dialogue and engagement with the national government. This could be of considerable benefit to the Church in China, and the pastoral practice of the Church in Vietnam could serve as a case study.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, it would be of immense benefit to the Asian Church if the FABC could devote much more attention to the theological basis and the pastoral implications of basic ecclesial communities, a privileged form of the local Church and a primary bearer of the mission of the Church. Being also basic human communities, these

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for ‘dialogue’ are believed to mask a relativism in which one theological or ecclesiological stance is considered as good as another, so the aim is simply for everyone to ‘get along,’ rather than to establish which positions cohere with the faith that comes from the apostles and which don’t.” Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Peter C. Phan argues that “interreligious dialogue can be practiced by people of faith, irrespective of educational level, social standing, and religious status,” and that “such dialogue is not merely a preparatory step toward peacemaking and reconciliation; it constitutes the very process of peacemaking and reconciliation itself, a process that occurs precisely in the acts of living together, working together, and praying together.” See “Praying to the Buddha: Living Amid Religious Pluralism,” *Commonweal* 134:2 (26 January 2007), <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE> (accessed 21 February 2006), Gale Document Number: A159183041.

<sup>39</sup> For an overview of the Church in China over the past fifty years and the new guidelines proposed by Pope Benedict XVI for reconciliation and cooperation in evangelisation between underground and official Catholics, see Benedict XVI, “Letter to Chinese Catholics,” *Origins* 37:10 (2 August 2007) 145-58. This letter also appeared as “Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China,” [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_china\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html) (accessed 12 July 2007). In a special report on religion and public life *The Economist* suggests that “the biggest prize for Christians across Asia is China itself. Some call it ‘the Africa of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’, recalling that the number of Christians in that continent rose from below 10m in 1900 to 400m in 2000. Officially, the Chinese government admits to 23m Christians within its borders, but it counts only churches that register with the authorities, and the real figure is probably around three times as high.” See “In God’s Name: a Special Report on Religion and Public Life,” *The Economist* (3 November 2007) 6. The report moves on to predict that China may “end up being both the world’s largest Christian country and its largest Muslim one.” Ibid., 8-9.

ecclesial entities represent a new way of being Church in Asia, an ecclesial institution that offers a contextual locus for integrating faith and life, Christianity and citizenry. This typology could be seen as a contemporary image of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles. A development of this theological construct would provide a basis for lay people to deepen their faith, an opportunity for them to judge the social environment in light of the Gospel, and a catalyst to become more conscious of their missionary role. It would also serve as a springboard for their journey into the world, where they are called to live their common priesthood in the everyday life of the world, and to increase their participation in the life and mission of the Church. In many parts of Asia, this new form of being Church is likely to be the only viable mechanism that offers the laity an environment to nourish their common faith, especially in countries where Christianity is proscribed, and to strengthen their beliefs against the onslaught of new forms of idolatry such as consumerism, relativism, and practical atheism. An increased emphasis on the concept of basic ecclesial communities, where laity and clergy pray and exchange ideas as equal partners, could represent a concrete and modest step in the implementation of a renewal of the structure of the Church, a priority that was foreshadowed by the FABC at the Fourth Plenary Assembly held in 1986. In these basic ecclesial communities, there is “a paradigm shift in the relationship between clergy, religious and lay people. Clericalism falls back and lay empowerment advances.”<sup>40</sup> This reform of the ecclesial structure, which is underpinned by a focus on the Church as a structured *communio* and an ordered view of ministries, would promote genuine collaboration between clergy and laity in all aspects of ministry, and will no doubt unleash all their talent and energy.

A third avenue that the Asian bishops could take is to follow the lead of Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* and reflect more deeply on the role of the family, youth, and women, as the prime agents of evangelisation, by elevating each of these roles into the main topic of a plenary assembly.<sup>41</sup> First, they could perhaps take as the

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<sup>40</sup> This observation was made in address by Orlando B. Quevedo, Archbishop of Nueva Segovia, Philippines, to the SEDOS Symposium accompanying the Synod for Asia held in 1998, “Seeds of the Kingdom,” *The Tablet* (30 May 1998) 696.

<sup>41</sup> We note that the FABC has chosen the Asian Family as the topic of the Eighth Plenary Assembly. See Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, “The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life: Final Statement of the Eighth Plenary Assembly, Daejeon, South Korea, 2004,” *FABC Papers*, No.

departure point the ecclesiological model of the family as the *ecclesia domestica* and use it as a basis for developing the identity and role of the family.<sup>42</sup> Second, the Church is duty-bound to provide young people with a solid religious education to equip them to be missionaries and witnesses in the world, which is driven by an inexorable move towards globalisation. In the society of today, many schools and colleges in Asia no longer provide young people with the holistic education they need, displaying instead a reductionist tendency that views education in terms of production, competition, and the market. Finally, being a rich and under-utilised human resources in the Church, women require special attention from the FABC. In fact, despite the changing role of women in society, which owes much to the “genius of women,”<sup>43</sup> they are still under-represented in the life and ministry of the Church. Here the bishops of Asia could benefit from the thought of Pope John Paul II who emphasises that “the presence and the role of women in the life and mission of the Church, although not linked to the ministerial priesthood, remain absolutely necessary and irreplaceable.”<sup>44</sup> In his view, “today their role is of capital importance both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the

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111, <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-0.htm> (accessed 31 July 2007. For Jojo Fung, this statement “proposes a radical paradigm shift in ecclesiology: the ‘Church begins in the home, not in the parish’ (no. 46).” See “An Appraisal of the Eighth Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences Synod on Family Life,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42:3 (2005) 291. John Prior notes that “in Southeast Asia between 45% to 65% of families are interfaith” (“The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life: A Personal Reflection on the Eighth FABC Plenary Assembly, Daejeon, South Korea,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42:3 [2005] 286); see also John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, nos. 45-7. The Pope had earlier emphasised the role of the family “at the service of the building up of the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church” (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 49), as a believing and evangelising community (nos. 51-4), as a community in dialogue with God (nos. 62), and as a community at the service of humanity (nos. 63-4).

<sup>42</sup> For a brilliant essay on the identity of the family as the domestic Church, and its trajectory and theological foundations, see Joseph C. Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 592-604. For Atkinson, with the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992 (e.g., no. 2204), “domestic church moved from an *analogous* position to an *ontological* relationship with the church” (ibid., 593). In his view, “the mystery of the baptized family is that we are called to be an organic part of the body of Christ, to participate in his nature and his salvific mission to the world. Only here does one find one’s true identity and purpose as individuals, as families, and as the domestic church” (ibid., 604). The model of the Church as the family of God was proposed by a Vietnamese bishop at the Second Vatican Council. See Simon Hoa Nguyen Van Hien, Episcopus Dalatensis, [“Intervention at Vatican II], Periodus II, Congregatio Generalis XL,” in *Acta Concilii Vaticani II* ([Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972]) 42-5. For a detailed treatment of this theme in the context of the local Church in Vietnam, see Ngo Dinh Tien, “The Church as Family of God: Its Development and Implications for the Church in Vietnam,” Ph.D. diss., Australian Catholic University, 2006.

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, “A Letter to Women,” *The Tablet* (15 July 1995) 918.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, “*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (1 June 1994) 1.

true face of the Church.”<sup>45</sup> The dire situation of the family, young people, and women in Asia calls for an articulation of their distinct identity and role in the Church, and for the FABC to provide a fresh direction that pertains to the three main loci of lay life, namely the family, the parish, and the market place.

Finally, the fourth suggestion we submit for consideration is this: the FABC should initiate a more comprehensive and longer term program of formation for the laity to enable them to deepen their spirituality, become better disciples and missionaries of the Word, understand more correctly their rightful place in the Church, and eagerly undertake their own ministry in the mission of the Church understood first and foremost as the *missio Dei*. This baptism-based program of formation will emphasise the common identity and mission of all the faithful, both laity and clergy, who are bound to one another in the one Church.<sup>46</sup> It also affirms that baptism is not just one event but is a part of the process of continual conversion, of being more deeply incorporated in the life of Christ and the Church in Asia, and of living the Gospel in the midst of all earthly activities.

The need for the pastors of the Church in Asia to give a high priority to the formation of lay people and to foster their active and full participation in the Church, had been spelled out in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution that declares that the exalted office of the pastors is “to be shepherds of the faithful and also recognize the latter’s contribution and charisms that everyone in his own way will, with one mind, cooperate in the common task.”<sup>47</sup> This conciliar statement amplifies what Pope Pius XI had said earlier in an impromptu talk given in 1939 to the young priests of the Canadian College in Rome on the fiftieth anniversary of this college, also his last will and testament as it was his last public audience.<sup>48</sup> Here the Pope encourages the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ladislav Orsy notes that one of the “two historical trends that contributed to the loss of sense and practice of participation,” in the Church is “the shift in emphasis from the sacrament of baptism to that of orders.” See “Participation in the Church as a Seminal Concept,” *Origins* 17:46 (28 April 1988) 799. For Orsy, participation is communion. Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Pope Pius XI’s statement is as follows: “I want you to take this message away with you. The church, the mystical body of Christ, has become a monstrosity. The head is very large, but the body is shrunk. You the priests, must rebuild that body of the church, and the only way that you can rebuild

clergy to mobilise lay people to be witnesses of Christ in the world. This teaching of *Lumen Gentium* also reflects the thought of John Henry Newman, who, over a century earlier, was concerned “to create of the laity an active force that would be at work both in the Church and in the world at large,”<sup>49</sup> and hence wanted an educated and faithful laity, “a laity, ‘well-catechised and faithful to their baptismal promises’.”<sup>50</sup> It also echoes a well-worn remark of this most English of holy men that in matters of doctrine as well as in pastoral governance the Church would look foolish without the faith and the participation of the laity.<sup>51</sup> We believe that the Asian bishops’ theology of the laity would be enriched and become more relevant if they follow these possible directions by conducting a new analysis of the current environment, offering a more extensive treatment of the proposed topics, and implementing the suggested pastoral initiatives.

### 10.2.2 Towards a Paradigm Shift in the FABC’s Theology of the Laity

To confidently move into these directions we suggest that a paradigm shift or a complete change of mindsets is required to craft a robust theology of the laity that encourages a much greater role for the laity in the Asian Church of the future. Paradigms are ways of construing reality based on certain fundamental assumptions. A shift occurs when one or more of those assumptions are found to be at best questionable. Many analyses of the vocation and mission of the laity proceed from a number of largely unexamined assumptions. Chief among these are the definition of the laity with reference to the clergy, and the insistence that there are two dimensions

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it is to mobilize the lay people. You must call upon the lay people to become, along with you, the witnesses of Christ. You must call them especially to bring Christ back to the workplace, to the marketplace.” Cited by Alex Carter, *A Canadian Bishop’s Memoirs* (North Bay, Ontario: Tomiko Publications, 1994) 50-1; quoted in Ladislav Orsy, “The Church of the Third Millennium,” in *Common Calling: The Laity and Governance of the Catholic Church*, edited by Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 250.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Chavass, “Newman and the Laity,” in *Newman Today*, edited by Stanley L. Jaki (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>51</sup> John Coulson, “Introduction,” in *John Henry Newman: On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, edited with an introduction by John Coulson and a foreword by Derek Worlock, Archbishop of Liverpool (London: Collins, 1986) 18-9; see also Derek Worlock, “Foreword,” *ibid.*, v. For Cardinal John Henry Newman, “‘in all times the laity have been the measure of the Catholic spirit’.” Quoted by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor in “Renewing the Parish: 1: Fired by the Spirit,” *The Tablet* (31 May 2003) 12.



of the mission of the Church with the proper role of the laity being in the world. If the present tension between the rise of the laity and the role of the clergy is ever to be resolved, these assumptions need rethinking.

The key assumption is the first: that of the laity defined with reference to the clergy and religious. Vatican II did not always provide a positive definition of the term “laity.” It was understood to mean “all the faithful except those in Holy Orders or in a religious state approved by the church.”<sup>52</sup> The ground for this definition is that there is an ontological difference between the laity and the clergy. This typological definition has been repeated endlessly in the documents of the Church so that the inference from them comes to obscure the fact that a priest is a layperson before being ordained, and does not cease to be a baptised person after receiving ordination. What is needed is to work from inside the mindset of those who hold on to this proposition, and see whether it is possible to induce a shift in that mindset and produce a definition of the laity simply as Christians.<sup>53</sup> To its credit, the FABC, while continuing to maintain an implicit distinction between the clergy and the laity has gone a long way in this direction by adopting a description, not a definition, of the laity as Asian Christians, a concept that underscores the double calling of faith and cultural belonging of lay people, and one that lies at the heart of what it means to be a Christian in Asia.

Only when we come to a positive definition of the laity as Christians can we change the second fixed idea that the mission of the laity has two separate dimensions *ad intra* and *ad extra*.<sup>54</sup> The persistent reference in magisterial documents, despite the emphasis on the unique mission of the Church, has perpetuated the ingrained perception in the mind of the faithful that there are two different realms, the sacred and the secular, and two different kinds of mission, one in the Church and one in the

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<sup>52</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

<sup>53</sup> Yves Congar frequently defines the laity as “Christians *sine addito*.” See “The Laity,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966) 241, 244; see also “Discussion,” *ibid.*, 269.

<sup>54</sup> For Avery Dulles, “it would be a mistake...to make a sharp dichotomy between ministry in the church and apostolate in the world, as if it were necessary to choose between them” (“Can Laity Properly Be Called ‘Ministers’,” *Origins* 35:44 [20 April 2006] 730).

world. These divisions between the Church and the world, and between vocation and mission, were seen in the titles of two major documents of the Church on the laity, namely the 1987 World Synod of Bishops on the “Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World,”<sup>55</sup> and the FABC’s 1986 Fourth Plenary Assembly on the “Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia.” Several aspects of this problem have been articulated over the years including those relating to drawing the demarcation line between the Church and the world, the dichotomy between the sanctuary and the marketplace, and the obstacle to provide an integrated view of Christian life.<sup>56</sup> The division between the identity and role, or the vocation and mission, of the laity, also separates nature and mission, ontology and praxis, and gives a strong impression that the role of lay people does not derive from who and what they are. In recent years, their increased participation in the Church through numerous lay ministries, which is fuelled in part by an acute shortage of priests, gives the lie to this pastoral separation between their mission in the Church and in the world. This observation leads us to advocate the employment of the term “mission” without the division between the *ad intra* and *ad extra* aspects.<sup>57</sup> Such usage would avoid dichotomizing clergy and laity in terms of ministries, in the

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<sup>55</sup> John L. May, Joseph L. Bernardin, Rembert G. Weakland and Stanley J. Ott, “What We Have Heard and What We Will Say,” *America* 157:5 (29 August – 5 September 1987) 109. Commenting on the official statements of the 1985 Synod, Joseph Komonchak notes that the “shifts in perspective and emphasis from Council to Synod lead one to fear that the distinction between *Ecclesia ad intra* and *Ecclesia ad extra* has been hardened.” See “The Synod of 1985 and the Notion of the Church,” *Chicago Studies* 26:3 (1987) 340. Komonchak also cautions against “the common but mistaken separation of the ‘nature’ and the ‘mission’ of the Church,” and asserts that “the Church does not first exist ‘in its mystery’ and then receive a ‘mission in history’”. Its mystery is precisely a dimension of the historical mission of Christ and therefore cannot be considered ‘in itself’ and without reference to the concrete tasks its own historical mission requires. And no mission may be undertaken by the Church except as an implication of the mystery from which it takes its rise.” *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>56</sup> Elissa Rinere has raised several pertinent questions: “If laity labor primarily ‘in the world’, what is to be understood about their efforts ‘in the Church’?” or “How can a Christian lead a unified and integrated life if the Christian does not live in an integrated environment? “If the Church is separate from the world, does that not imply that the exercise of religion is separate from everyday life?” See “Canon Law and Emerging Understandings of Ministry,” in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, edited by Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003) 77-8; see also Joseph Komonchak, “Clergy, Laity and the Church’s Mission in the World,” in *Official Ministry in a New Age*, edited by James H. Provost (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1981) 168-93.

<sup>57</sup> In an address to lay people on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes* in Liège, John Paul II discouraged the separation between these two modes of collaboration in the building up of the Church: “baptisés et insérés dans le monde, tels sont les deux axes de votre condition. Votre terrain d’action est à la fois l’Eglise et le monde.” Quoted by Patrick Valdrini, “La mission des laïcs dans le magistère de Jean-Paul II,” *Ius Canonicum* 26:51 (1986) 86.

Church and in the world, respectively.<sup>58</sup> In our view, there is a deep reciprocity between the internal affairs of the Church and the events of the world such that whatever happens in either sphere will have impact in the other. The entire Church is in the world, and all ministries are fundamentally oriented towards the Church's mission to the world in the service of the kingdom of God.<sup>59</sup> This assertion is consistent with the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* which emphasises that the whole Church, not just the laity, has a secular dimension, and within it, lay people have a particular secular character.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, we argue that the Church's cause could be enhanced if lay people are defined or described purely and simply as Christians,<sup>61</sup> and the mission of the laity be expressed without the *ad intra* and *ad extra* qualifications. If such a definition and usage could be acceptable to the magisterium it would become a foundation for a new ecclesiological framework of cooperation between clergy and laity, one that maintains the unity between them but at the same time allows them to actively engage in specific activities that pertain to their specific vocation and charisms. It could also initiate a pastoral revolution that could reinvent the laity, spur lay activity, and bring about "a springtime as we cannot imagine."<sup>62</sup> Repeating this hopeful expression of Yves Congar, Pope John Paul II declares that "this Christian springtime, many signs of which we can already glimpse, is perceivable in the radical choice of faith, in the genuine holiness of life, in the extraordinary apostolic zeal of many lay faithful, men

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<sup>58</sup> For Avery Dulles, "Since the council some have maintained that the clergy have as their proper sphere of operation the inner affairs of the church, whereas lay persons should regard secular matters as their area of competence. The council, however, does not authorize such a sharp division of labor" (*The Reshaping of Catholicism* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988] 27). To support his observation, Dulles cited *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 5, which "exhorts lay persons 'to exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders'." Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph Komonchak also argues that "there is, after all, no *Ecclesia ad intra* except as an *Ecclesia ad extra*." See "The Synod of 1985 and the Notion of the Church," *Chicago Studies* 26:3 (1987) 340.

<sup>60</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40; *Lumen Gentium* (no. 38) also teaches that "what the soul is in the body, let Christians be in the world."

<sup>61</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (no. 30) prefers to consider clergy, religious and laity as subsets of the more encompassing term Christian faithful: "Having made clear the functions of the hierarchy, the holy Council is pleased to turn its attention to the state of those Christians who are called the laity. Everything that has been said of the People of God is addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy."

<sup>62</sup> Yves M.J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, rev. ed., trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965) xviii.

and women, the young, adults and the elderly.”<sup>63</sup> For the pontiff, with the Second Vatican Council “*the hour of the laity* truly struck, and many lay faithful, men and women, more clearly understood their Christian vocation, which by its very nature is a vocation to the apostolate.”<sup>64</sup> This apostolate is indispensable, “if the Gospel is to be the light, salt and leaven of a new humanity,”<sup>65</sup> because as witnesses to Christ, the lay faithful are called “to bring the light of the Gospel to the vital nerve centres of society.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, he encourages lay people to “once again take the documents of the Second Vatican Council in hand to rediscover the great wealth of its doctrinal and pastoral motives.”<sup>67</sup> This conciliar treasure, to a large extent, is contained in *Lumen Gentium*, a theological masterpiece that highlights the important function of lay people and its Christological authority by declaring that “until the full manifestation of his glory, he [Jesus] fulfils this prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also by the laity.”<sup>68</sup>

In sum, this thesis has revealed the creativity of the FABC’s theology of the laity in its response to the concrete, existential, and historical context of Asia and offered an excellent example of a contextual and relational theology of engagement and dialogue, a theology that is both open to the *Zeitgeist* and yet deeply anchored in the Gospel and the tradition of the Church. So, while quick generalisations are always misleading, we observe that all in all the FABC’s theology of the laity has provided more than mere rudiments and indeed signalled a great sea change in the theology of the laity of the twentieth-century. Its main contribution is the rediscovery of the broad and deep Christian tradition of the role of the laity, which had for many centuries been narrowed down in a hierarchical system that views the laity as secondary members of the Church. What it offers is a rich and profound interpretation of the mission of the

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<sup>63</sup> John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness John Paul II,” in *The Congress of Catholic Laity: Rome 2000*, edited by the Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) 8.

<sup>64</sup> John Paul II, “Homily of His Holiness John Paul II on the Occasion of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity,” *ibid.*, 12; see also “Message of His Holiness John Paul II,” *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, “Homily of His Holiness John Paul II on the Occasion of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity,” *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 35.

laity as a dialogical engagement with society, religions, and cultures, and thereby regains the genuine Catholic character that was lost during the time when the role of the laity was understood to be merely providing assistance to the hierarchy in the fulfilment of the mission of the Church. However, in our view, this theology did not go far enough. In fact, it has not completely extricated itself from the current theological mindset, which is still burdened with a clergy-based definition of the laity and an oft-repeated cliché of mission *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Its main theological motif of triple dialogue also needs to be augmented with the fourth dialogical dimension, one that has been advocated by the Vietnamese bishops, namely the dialogue with the national government.

One thing that is common to the theologies of the laity of the FABC, Pope John Paul II, and the VEC is that they are all sourced from the teachings of Vatican II, the Council that emphasises the centrality of the human person and dignity,<sup>69</sup> and one that understands that the Church is called to build up the kingdom of God in the world. Like the theology of *Gaudium et Spes*, these theologies are pre-eminently anthropological in character. For its part, as a contextual and relational theology par excellence, the FABC's theology of the laity holds on to a dialogical and dialectic relationship with the world by maintaining a constructive but critical engagement with the local context, and a creative fidelity to the tradition of the Church. While still being at the point of departure rather than at the place of arrival, and despite its minor ecclesiological deficits discussed above, the FABC's theology of the laity has displayed the features of both a local and a universal theology. It speaks directly to the localised audience but its message is also relevant to the whole Church. As the Church in Asia is entering into the twenty-first century a central question facing the Asian bishops is what role the laity could and should play in the Church and in the world of Asia. Our suggestion is that the Asian Church will be truest to its identity when all of its members, laity, clergy, and religious, acknowledge their rightful place and distinctive role, actively participate in the Spirit-led mission to build up the body of Christ and the kingdom of God, and boldly proclaim the most decisive event in

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<sup>69</sup> The emphasis on the centrality of the human person has been prominent and consistent in papal teachings. For instance, in his opening address to the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in May 2007, Pope Benedict XVI affirms that "as in all areas of human activity, globalisation too must be led by ethics, placing everything at the service of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God." Benedict XVI, "Belief Beyond the Political," *The Tablet* (19 May 2007) 15.

history, the unique relevance of the triune God in the death and resurrection of the Jesus Christ. For the Asian laity struggling to come to terms with their identity and mission in the Church of the third millennium, the FABC's theology of the laity offers an elegantly clear guide, and in this regard, it can hardly be bettered.

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