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THE CHURCH IN ASIA AND PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS

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The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has been the most influential body in the Asian Church since the Second Vatican Council. It has strengthened the bonds of communication among Catholic communities and their bishops and has contributed to the development of a shared vision of the Church and her evangelizing mission in Asia. The FABC asserts that the pathway for the Church in Asia to truly discover its own identity is to continually engage in a three-fold dialogue: with Asian peoples (especially the poor) (integral development), Asian cultures (inculturation), and Asian religions (interfaith dialogue). This programmatic vision of a "triple dialogue" has constructively guided the FABC for nearly four decades. In a word, one can validly assert that the FABC is truly "Asia's Continuing Vatican II."

An FABC Introduction

Before addressing the links between the FABC and migration, the specific topic of this presentation, a brief background contextualization on the FABC appears necessary. The FABC is

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a transnational episcopal structure that brings together eighteen bishops' conferences from the following countries as full members: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. FABC has ten associate members drawn from the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of East Timor, Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan, Macau, Mongolia, Nepal, Siberia, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Thus, in total, twenty-eight countries are represented in the FABC, which grew out of the historic gathering of 180 Asian Catholic Bishops with Pope Paul VI during his 1970 Asian visit; it was on November 16, 1972 that Paul VI officially approved the FABC Statutes.

These FABC statutes have gone through several revisions since their initial approval; the current statutes, modified in 1995, have been approved by the Holy See. FABC describes its principal functions in seven points: 1) To study ways and means of promoting the apostolate, especially in the light of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents, and according to the needs of Asia; 2) To work for and to intensify the dynamic presence of the Church in the total development of the peoples of Asia; 3) To help in the study of problems of common interest to the Church in Asia, and to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinated actions; 4) To promote inter-communication and cooperation among local Churches and bishops of Asia; 5) To render service to episcopal conferences of Asia in order to help them to meet better the needs of the People of God; 6) To foster a more ordered development of organizations and movements in the Church at the international level; 7) To foster ecumenical and interreligious communication and collaboration. Several of these goals converge in the service that the FABC seeks to render to millions of migrants in Asia.

Aside from a modest central structure, there are nine FABC offices which carry out many concrete initiatives and projects. The offices, purposely scattered among various Asian nations, are focused on evangelization, social communication, laity and family, human development, education and faith formation, ecumenical and interreligious affairs, theological concerns, clergy, and consecrated life.

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Each of these offices sponsors a wide variety of activities that promote the growth of the Asian local Churches.

The supreme body of the FABC is the Plenary Assembly, which convenes approximately every four years. The themes, places, and dates of the ten plenary assemblies include the following: **I**. "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia" (Taipei, Taiwan: 1974); **II**. "Prayer—the Life of the Church in Asia" (Calcutta, India: 1978); **III**. "The Church—Community of Faith in Asia" (Bangkok, Thailand: 1982); **IV**. "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia" (Tokyo, Japan: 1986); **V**. "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium" (Bandung, Indonesia: 1990); **VI**. "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life" (Manila, Philippines: 1995); **VII**. "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service" (Samphran, Thailand: 2000); **VIII**. "The Asian Family toward a Culture of Integral Life" (Daejeon, Korea: 2004); **IX**. "Living the Eucharist in Asia" (Manila, Philippines: 2009); and **X**. "FABC at Forty: Responding to the Challenges of Asia" (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: 2012).

The Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in the year 2000 provided an insightful synthesis of the thirty years of the FABC; it noted that FABC's evolutionary history could be seen as "a concerted series of movements toward a renewed Church." FABC VII identified eight key movements: 1) A movement towards a "Church of the Poor and a Church of the Young," 2) A movement toward a "truly local Church … incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated," 3) A movement toward "deep interiority," toward "a deeply praying community," 4) A movement toward "an authentic community of faith … a community of communities," 5) A movement toward "active integral evangelization," 6) A movement toward "empowerment of men and women," 7) A movement toward "generating and serving life," and 8) A movement toward "the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with the cultures" of Asia (see FAPA III: 3–4). Taken as a whole, these few introductory paragraphs present the FABC vision of a renewed Church in Asia. It is this community of faith that has also addressed the issue of migration, seeking to give a vital, pastoral contribution.

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The basic documents of the plenary assemblies and the initiatives of the FABC offices are available in the four volumes of *For All the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA) (Manila: Claretian Publications). The *FABC Papers*, continuously published since 1976, are available in print form and on the FABC homepage as well as on the UCANews website at its *FABC Papers* link (see numbers 100 and 125 for comprehensive indexes). The four FAPA volumes and the individually numbered *FABC Papers* are indispensable resources for FABC material. To date (2008), twenty-six doctoral dissertations have been completed on various FABC themes (see Kroeger, *Theology from the Heart of Asia: I–II*).

FABC Initiatives on Migration

As noted in the functions and movements listed above, the FABC as a collegial body seeks to promote evangelization and the apostolate, to address problems of common interest to the Church in Asia, and to investigate possible solutions and coordinated action. In light of these specific goals and with an office dedicated to human development, the challenges of migration fall naturally within FABC concerns. In addition, there are over fifty million migrant workers in Asia (*Asian Migration Atlas 2010*), not to mention other forms of migration; undoubtedly, this is a key pastoral challenge for the local Churches of the FABC region. The involvement of the FABC with the reality of migration in Asia will now be presented in three segments: a) a Chronological Overview of specific endeavors and initiatives; b) an Integrated Vision of FABC Service for migrants; and, c) some Insights and Learnings from the FABC role in this ministry. One begins with the history of FABC migration initiatives.

Brief History

In elaborating the role of the FABC vis-à-vis migration, one must recall that as a newly formed ecclesial body in Asia in the early 1970s, the FABC needed adequate time to find its proper role and function within the local Churches of Asia. However, from its inception, the

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FABC has had a clear focus on serving the social needs of Asia's burgeoning masses. In the 1970 meeting with Pope Paul VI in Manila (the impetus for initiating the FABC), the Asian bishops declared that they wished to form "a true community of peoples … with the deepest sense of solidarity." They desired to "more truly be at the service of our peoples," to show "more compassion and solicitude for the poor," and to place themselves "at the side of the multitudes in our continent" (FAPA I, 4–5). Specifically, migration was assigned to the Office of Human Development (OHD), created in 1973 and tasked to guide the Asian Church's social involvement.

The First Plenary Assembly in 1974 affirmed the continuing FABC commitment to a "dialogue of life" with the people; "in so many countries of Asia, [this] means dialogue with the poor … [who live] under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them." The FABC committed itself to serve people's "real needs and aspirations" and to work for "the change and transformation of unjust social structures" (FAPA I, 15). This same social commitment is found in the Second Plenary Assembly in 1978; the FABC stated: "Since millions in Asia are poor, the Church in Asia must be the Church of the poor. One element in holiness, here, is the practice of justice. Evangelization and development are not opposed. In Asia today they are integral parts of preaching the Gospel" (FAPA I, 23). In a word, when the migration issue surfaced more predominantly in the 1980s, the FABC was prepared due to its early social orientation and commitment to serve Asia's needy peoples.

In the message of the 1979 International Congress on Mission held in Manila, one finds mention of "the desperate plight and terrible suffering of hundreds of thousands of refugees (forced migrants) from different countries, but especially those from Indochina, now in camps or on the high seas or seeking to cross frontiers" (FAPA I, 132). This statement predominantly reflects the reality of the "boat people" after the 1975 fall of Vietnam. Similarly, the participants of the Third FABC Plenary Assembly in 1982 noted that they were "deeply concerned about the refugee problem of South East Asia" (FAPA I, 62).

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The 1982 Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate held in Taiwan, in its "Syllabus of Mission Concerns" which mentions "emigrant workers," states: "Pastoral care for the great number of Asians who have emigrated from their homelands for economic reasons demands the serious missionary concern of the Churches" (FAPA I, 108). The Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly in 1986 speaks of "the Church's preferential option for the poor" and specifically mentions "domestic workers in countries other than their own, who are exploited as cheap labor" and also "migrants from villages to cities and other countries" (FAPA I, 188–189).

Another Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate, held in Korea in 1988, speaks of migrants in the context of their missionary potential: "Use the mobility and migration of the faithful as an opportunity to spread the Gospel of Christ. We should inspire, educate, and organize our migrants to be witnesses of Christ wherever they may go" (FAPA I, 294). The FABC Office of Human Development organized the Asian Institute for Social Action (AISA) to facilitate Church solidarity with different sectors of the poor. Migrants and their concerns were the focus of AISA programs in Macao in 1989, in Yokohama in 1990, and in Taipei in 1991.

The year 1992 witnessed three Asia-wide Church events concerned with migration. In April, the FABC Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) completed its massive work on the document, "Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics." In analyzing threats to social life, the TAC discussed the separation of children and parents, "who for economic reasons are forced to become migrant workers" (TAC, 2.3). The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People organized in June the First Consultative Meeting for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees in Asia; a book of the same title was published by this Vatican office. In November, the FABC Office of Evangelization sponsored the Asian Congress on Evangelization with over 2,000 participants. Bishop G. Reyes spoke on the topic of

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"Evangelization and Migration" and a topical workshop was devoted to this specific question.[1]

Readers should note that the FABC material presented thus far, though expressive of a deep, ongoing pastoral concern, does not address migration in a comprehensive manner. The first relatively integral treatment of the question came in September 1993 when the FABC Office of Human Development sponsored in Hong Kong the symposium: "Journeying Together in Faith with the Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia" (FAPA II, 47–56). The final statement provides a synopsis of the reality in Asia, the implications for the Church, and the important roles of both the "receiving" and "sending" Churches. The document links care for migrants with the FABC vision of "a new way of being Church" and notes: "This for us means pastoral care of migrants and to be co-workers with them, in order to bring more humanizing dimensions to every facet of life today…. This calls for prophetic discipleship and integral evangelization in the context of Asia today" (FAPA II, 56).

FABC celebrated its silver jubilee in 1995. A triple event unfolded in Manila: a FABC plenary assembly to commemorate the twenty-five years of the organization (1970–1995), the World Youth Day in Manila, and the second pastoral visit of John Paul II to the Philippines. The migration question also received due prominence. In preparation for the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly, G. Battistella prepared an elaborate overview with significant background material on the situation of migrant workers in Asia; this pivotal document was published as *FABC Papers 73* (see bibliography). Another pre-assembly paper on ecumenism written by T. Michel expressed concern for migrants (*FABC Papers 92s,* 4). During FABC VI itself, Indian theologian S. Arokiasamy in his plenary session paper spoke extensively of migrants (*FABC Papers 70,* 8–13, 28, 34). The final document of FABC VI, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," addresses migrants in

[1]See C. Almario, *Evangelization in Asia* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1993), 119–125, 184.

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several places (FAPA II, 11–12; *FABC Papers 74,* 47 and 79). In short, the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly gave a very high profile treatment to the migration question.

In November 1995, the FABC Office of Laity organized a Bishops' Institute on Lay Apostolate (BILA) with the title "Role of Women in Church and Society toward 2000" (FAPA II, 91–96). Aside from addressing several themes, such as trafficking in women, the final statement noted: "Women are also driven to leave their homes and migrate to urban areas or overseas to take jobs under exploitative working conditions" (FAPA II, 93). The following year (1996) the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People organized a Second Consultation which focused on the family, undocumented migrants and refugees.

The FABC Office of Human Development, under the dynamic direction of Anthony Rogers, sponsored in 1997 the "Colloquium on Church in Asia in the Twenty-first Century" and published the extensive proceedings in a book edited by A. Rogers with the same title (see bibliography). It includes a presentation on "The Church in Asia and the Challenge of Migration" (343–348), a workshop report (371–374), and some proposals on migration (427–428); see also FAPA III, 40–41. The Asian Synod held in Rome in 1998 took up migration issues; they appear in the 1999 document *Ecclesia in Asia* numbers 7b, 7c, 22b, and 34c (see Kroeger-Phan in bibliography).

As the new millennium dawned in 2000, Church personnel from across Asia gathered together at the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in Thailand. Once again, as in FABC VI in Manila (1995), migration was allotted significant attention. To highlight the Asian Church's service to migrants and refugees, J. Latoza prepared a significant and comprehensive study paper (*FABC Papers 92f;* see bibliography). The migrant theme also emerges in the paper of T. Michel on ecumenism (*FABC Papers 92s,* 4). The Final Statement of FABC VII highlights "Sea-based and Land-based Migrants and Refugees" as one of the five special areas of FABC pastoral emphasis (*FABC Papers 93,* 11–12; FAPA III, 11). A particularly insightful series of ten recommendations that emerged from the workshop on migrants and refugees is available

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(*FABC Papers 95,* 32–33); these will be presented later as a serviceable synthesis of the role of the FABC in migration.

A significant initiative was undertaken by the FABC Office of Human Development in July 2002. Held in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, the Fifth FIESA (Faith Encounters in Social Action) focused on "Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees: A New Way of Being Church" (FAPA IV, 89–133; see bibliography under A. Rogers). This extensive document, specifically its comprehensiveness on undocumented migrants, could be read as a kind of FABC *vademecum* for migrant ministry in Asia. Once again, it reflects the serious dedication that the FABC has given to people on the move and in transition.

The Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, hosted by the Korean Church in 2004, focused on "The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life" (FAPA IV, 1–74; *FABC Papers 111*). Two sections of the document focus on migration: "The Phenomenon of Asian Migration" (FAPA IV, 6–7) and "Priorities and Plans" (FAPA IV, 49–51).

The FABC continued its efforts for migrants in 2006 with three events. In January, the FABC Office of Human Development facilitated the six-day "Asian Consultation on Harmony through Reconciliation" (FIESA VII) to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). Edited by A. Rogers and published as a book with the same title (see bibliography), this consultation addressed a wide variety of topics. Two presentations focused on migration matters: "A Ministry for the Empowerment of Migrant Women" (251–261) and "Pastoral Care of Migrants" (263–266). In September, the FABC Office of Human Development sponsored the Bishops' Institute for Christian Advocacy (BICA I) in Kuala Lumpur with the topic "Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees" (FAPA IV, 145–146).

In October of 2006, the FABC Office of Evangelization and the Episcopal Conference of Thailand co-sponsored the First Asian Mission Congress (AMC). As the largest event ever undertaken by the FABC, the mission congress gave due prominence to migrants in Asia. Maruja Asis, a migration expert from Manila, addressed the

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large international assembly, speaking on "Migrants and the Search for Home." The final AMC statement, "Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia," recalls the importance of the migrants' story and experience (FAPA IV, 274).

"The Migrant Family in Asia: Reaching Out and Touching Them" was the theme for the Second Bishops' Institute for Christian Advocacy (BICA II) held in Sabah, Malaysia from December 4–8, 2007. Facilitated by the FABC Office of Human Development, the participants discussed the immediate needs and concerns of migrants in their countries with their counterpart Church and NGO organizations. The proceedings were published as a book in 2008; it was edited by A. Rogers and bears the same title as BICA II (see bibliography).

The Ninth FABC Plenary Assembly in August 2009, focusing on the theme "Living the Eucharist in Asia," mentions migrants several times in the context of the Eucharist. FABC Secretary General, Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, OMI, included the concerns of migrants in his lengthy report to the Plenary Assembly. The final document emphasizes the need to build an inclusive community to celebrate the Eucharist; the assembly is to become a "Family in God" which will be a "Countersign to Divisions." Thus, it is imperative to include people from all strata of society; the Church needs to make a conscious effort to overcome "the rejection of 'outsiders' like migrant workers, refugees and displaced peoples." Indeed, "living the Eucharist involves the call to live a gathering and welcoming rather than a scattering community" (*FABC Papers 129*, 7–8).

Vision of Migrant Service

The foregoing narrative of FABC involvement in the promotion of the cause of migrants and refugees may appear as a rather laborious chronicle of events, dates, themes, and references. Yet, it manifests the Asian Church's commitment on a continental level. Forging a synthesis of the abundant material may be nigh impossible. However, the thematic workshop recommendations of the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in 2000 can provide an overview of the tasks facing

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the local Churches in Asia. They are presented for their reflective and evocative qualities—as the FABC continues to shape its vision of a new way of being Church in Asia (*FABC Papers 95,* 32–33).

The Church in the FABC region of Asia must respond to these ten areas of concern for an adequate pastoral-missionary response to Asia's millions of migrants:

1. *Structure:* Set up an office for migrants on land and at sea, refugees and itinerant peoples within FABC to serve the program planning, implementation and networking needs of the national bishops' conferences in their responses to the migration and refugee issues/concerns, in cooperation with the religious congregations and lay organizations with a charism for migrants and refugees.

2. *Integration:* Evolve integrative schemes to respond to the need for: a) comprehensive pastoral and social care work programs; b) community dynamics that facilitate and promote the participation and "belonging" of the migrant/refugee, as well as the nurturing welcome of the host/refugee community; c) family dynamics that bridge the international gaps and socio-cultural differences between migrant worker parents and their children, and their respective psycho-social needs.

3. *Formation:* Provide formative input to: a) migrant workers on land and at sea, refugees and IDPs to being faithful to the Gospel, and to witnessing this in their lives, as well as living out the nurturing values of primacy of the family, joyful and compassionate relationship with God and neighbor; b) Church workers to effectively provide culturally and gender sensitive pastoral and social care for migrants and refugees and IDPs.

4. *Conscientization:* Sensitize migrant workers, employers, sending and receiving governments, recruiters,

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and local Christian communities to respond to the dehumanization of migrant workers. For refugees, this will address states and communities of origin and refuge, UN agencies, international and local NGOs on the multiple disadvantages of refugees in terms of ethnicity, religion and political rights.

5. *Reintegration:* Develop and promote reintegration schemes between and among Churches of origin and destination to enable migrant workers and their families to manage the economic benefits from overseas migrant work experience, and discourage the making of overseas labor migration as a family strategy for survival. For refugees and IDPs, this involves repatriation/reintegration/resettlement schemes between and among Churches of origin and refuge to enable returnees to rebuild their lives in peace and security.

6. *Networking:* Establish linkages between and among Churches of origin and destination, as well as with other Christian Churches and religious traditions for program planning and implementation.

7. *Advocacy:* Pursue policy advocacy with sending and receiving governments, UN agencies, the international and local NGOs, other Christian Churches and religious traditions for the rights of migrant workers (land and sea-based), refugees and IDPs, regardless of their legal status.

8. *Education:* Provide sensitizing education to children of migrants through existing educational institutions, as well as informal education groups.

9. *Staffing:* Appoint qualified Church workers who, as much as possible, are of the same nationality as, or are familiar with the language and culture of, the migrant workers on land and at sea, refugees and IDPs.

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10. *Affirmation:* Recognize and support efforts of Church workers in providing pastoral and social care to migrant workers, refugees and IDPs. These pastoral and social initiatives range from sacramental care to medical services, legal aid, policy and human rights advocacy and counseling.

FABC Insights and Learnings

Reviewing the involvement of the FABC over the past several decades (see earlier historical section), one remarkably observes that from the mid-1980s until the present, there have been consistent, almost yearly, activities for the promotion of migrants. There were a variety of initiatives in several years. The FABC Office of Human Development, established in 1973, has done an admirable job in attending to migrants and refugees; recall that migration is only one of the many areas that this FABC Office coordinates.

This writer has come upon some critique that the FABC has done little to promote the migration ministry in Asia. At times this judgment is based on inadequate and partial information—thus, the decision to provide here the lengthy historical chronicle. In addition, particularly in recent FABC Plenary Assemblies (the highest authority in the FABC), the migration questions have received a very prominent profile. Recall in particular that in the 1995 and 2000 Plenary Assemblies, where lengthy position papers were prepared, migration discussion groups were integral to the assembly process, and the relevant concerns were expressed in the final document.

Appreciating the efforts of the FABC for migration demands that one must understand the nature of the FABC. In fulfilling its pastoral-missionary role, the FABC seeks to motivate the member local Churches to implement the vision of a renewed Church in Asia. In a word, the FABC is not primarily an implementing structure; that belongs directly to the local Churches, national bishops' conferences, individual dioceses, religious congregations with particular charisms, and all committed Christians. Among the various bishops' conferences

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that have responsibly taken their role in migrant ministry, one can mention Taiwan, Korea, Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore. Admittedly, more could obviously be done.

A perusal of the FABC initiatives will reveal that a comprehensive theology of migration has not yet emerged on the Asian level (whereas this theological growth has occurred with the theology of Local Church and the practice of Interfaith Dialogue). FABC initiatives and experience could provide substantial building-blocks for such a migration theology to emerge.

There have been repeated calls for the FABC to establish a separate office for migrants, yet this has not happened. This author, a serious student of the FABC and its vision, believes that the FABC actually functions better because it only has established nine specific offices, each with a broad apostolic coverage. Relative simplicity of administrative structure has avoided the growth of a burdensome bureaucracy. In addition, it is helpful to know that other important segments of the Church in Asia have asked for—and been refused—a separate full FABC office (e.g., the indigenous, workers, liturgy, inculturation). There is much FABC wisdom here.

These foregoing evaluative comments seek only to promote the continued growth of the FABC and its service to all the peoples of Asia so that the FABC may show "more compassion and solicitude for the poor"—including the migrants. With renewed vigor, the FABC seeks to stand in solidarity "at the side of the multitudes" in the Asian continent (FAPA I, 5). Everyone remains open to new Spirit-inspired initiatives within the FABC; everyone certainly must be deeply grateful for the nearly four decades of FABC loving witness and service in Asia.

Pope Benedict XVI noted at the Angelus during the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2006: "Migration is a very widespread phenomenon in today's world; it is a 'sign of the times'." While many difficulties and challenges remain, the Church—including the FABC—"asks her faithful to welcome the positive aspects that this sign of the times bears within it, overcoming every kind of discrimination,

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injustice and contempt of the human person, for every man and woman is the image of God" (see www.vatican.va).

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