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DIALOGUE BETWEEN LOCAL CHURCHES

An Asian Vision and Experience

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When in 1974 the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) gathered for the first time in plenary assembly in Taipei, the Asian bishops articulated their vision of a "local church." It is no secret that the esteemed Filipino theologian Catalino Arevalo, S.J., had a prominent role in the drafting of that vision. That vision of local church has since become a morning star that through the past forty years has guided the renewal of the Church in Asia. The present reflection is a tribute to Fr. Arevalo who superbly articulated the thoughts of the Asian bishops. It also describes the path of dialogue among local churches in the renewal of the Church in Asia.

Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law use the words "particular church" to refer to a diocese. The term describes a "section of the People of God entrusted to a bishop … so that it constitutes one particular church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active."[1]

[1]See *Lumen gentium* 23; *Christus dominus* 11; Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 368–369. Pope John Paul II's post-synodal exhortation on bishops, *Pastores gregis*, follows the same terminology; see, e.g., nos. 55–56, 63. But his pastoral exhortation after the Special Synod for Asia, *Ecclesia in Asia*, uses the terms

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On the other hand, in the understanding of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), the term "local church" involves the contextualizing of the particular church among a specific people with their culture(s). In this understanding, a "particular church" is not a "local church" simply by situating it in one "locality" or by entrusting a section of the People of God to a bishop. For a particular church to become "local" in a real sense, it has to be *localized*; it has to go through a process of immersion, of being rooted in the local culture(s) of the people.

In this presentation, that is the meaning of "local church." As much as possible, the testimony on the dialogue between local churches will come mostly from the Asian bishops themselves.

An Asian Vision of the Local Church

How did the FABC understanding of "local church" come about?

Christianity in Asia has long been considered by some as a "foreign religion," brought to Asia by European colonizers. But Asian history glosses over the fact that Christianity is truly Asian. It emerged from the message and life of Jesus the Christ whose very brief life and even briefer public ministry seem to have ended in failure, in his ignominious crucifixion. He was truly Asian, born and bred in Asia Minor. His obscure parents were Asians. His first disciples and missionaries were Asians. His brief life flashed like a brilliant meteor in Asian skies.

And yet the history of Christianity in the vast FABC territory that extends from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, with two thirds of the world's population, begs the following questions:

- How is the Church to evangelize in a way that would resonate with the Asian thirst for the divine?

"local church" and "particular church" interchangeably (e.g., nos. 20, 24–25). At the Synod, the Asian bishops generally used the term "local church."

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- How can the Church credibly and eloquently proclaim Jesus, whose words powerfully moved ordinary Asians of his time?
- In a continent where only about 3% of more than four billion people are Christians?
- In a continent that is rich with ancient cultures and religious traditions?
- But with people most of whom are appallingly poor?
- And where social and political awakening has been taking place due significantly to freedom movements among young people?

It was to confront such burning questions that Asian bishops from 14 episcopal conferences and 18 countries gathered in Taipei in 1974 for the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC. In dialogue with one another, together they discerned the pastoral situation in Asia, "the signs of the times." Asia, they said, is a continent undergoing "profound social change." Modernization, secularization, and industrialization threaten centuries-old patterns of life and social relationships, meanings, and values. They discovered among Asians a quest for new meaning and fuller freedom, a deep desire to create "more genuine communion."[2]

They declared that the ultimate answer to these profound human longings is in Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6).[3] Therefore, with great urgency the Church needs to proclaim Jesus in the Asian context, "to share with our peoples what is most precious in our hearts and in our lives, Jesus Christ and His Gospel, the unsurpassable riches of Christ" (cf. Eph. 3:8).[4]

They then made a bold and extraordinary statement:

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[2]See FABC I Final Statement, nos. 4–5.

[3]FABC I, no. 7.

[4]FABC I, no. 8.

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> To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. *The primary task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church* [no. 9]. *For the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time* [no. 10].

In almost lyrical style and tone, the Asian bishops drew up a vision of the "local church" that would become the foundational insight guiding the pastoral ministry of many Asian bishops in the years to come:

> The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry.—Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God's Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in His paschal mystery [no. 12].

The Local Church—A Church of Dialogue

The local church—a church "*in continuous humble and loving dialogue*" with all the life-realities of its peoples, their poverty, their cultures, and religious traditions: here lies the kernel of the "triple dialogue" of the Church in Asia. The Asian bishops described the local church as a Church in dynamic *triple dialogue*

- with the cultures of the people (inculturation),
- with the different religious traditions (interreligious dialogue),
- and with the poor (integral liberation) (nos. 14–28).

The bishops summarized their thoughts in the final three paragraphs of this section:

> Indigenization renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples. Through it, all their human reality is assumed

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> into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled [no. 26].
>
> Through the second task, the Asian religions are brought into living dialogue with the Gospel, so that the seeds of the Word in them may come to full flower and fruitfulness within the life of our peoples [no. 27].
>
> Finally, through the "preaching of the good news to the poor" (Lk. 4:18), Christ's renewing life and the power of His paschal mystery [are] inserted into our peoples' search for human development, for justice, brotherhood and peace [no. 28].

Through the years, the Asian bishops consistently and insistently maintained this pastoral thematic in their major declarations. They held as non-negotiable the centrality of proclaiming Jesus as the Lord and Savior. But the basic mode of the mission of evangelization is dialogue. Pope John Paul II himself recognized this Asian reality of dialogue when he wrote: "The actual celebration of the (Asian) Synod itself confirmed the importance of dialogue as *a characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia*."[5]

From Vision to Life— Becoming a Church of Dialogue through Dialogue with Other Local Churches

At the Level of the FABC

The Asian bishops who participated in the Taipei groundbreaking event went back to their respective particular churches with the vision of a local church in their minds. Many were already doing inter-religious dialogue and works of development with the poor. The work of inculturation, however, has no step-by-step process. In subsequent meetings and discussions at the episcopal conferences and at the level of the FABC, their dialogue with one another would make them realize that inculturation is a dialogue with the Spirit whose renewing action within the cultures of peoples had to be recognized.

[5] *Ecclesia in Asia* 3.

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Through the years, the FABC plenary assemblies and the FABC offices would be significantly instrumental in assisting Asian bishops to realize the vision of a local church. One can certainly state that the FABC provided the venue for Asian bishops, shepherds of their local churches, to engage in *a process of dialogue between local churches*.

How did this take place? FABC offices organized bishops' institutes and seminars on evangelization, family, laity, youth, women, social action, interreligious dialogue (with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Confucians, and Taoists), social communications, catechesis, and education. Often there were priests, religious, and lay faithful in the gatherings. Through these activities, Asian bishops gained knowledge about, and experience in, various aspects of the local church-in-mission.

The building of parishes into a communion of communities through Basic Ecclesial Communities increasingly became a priority among many Asian bishops. This pastoral thrust was promoted by a desk in the FABC Office of the Laity. Its approach was developed through the collaborative efforts of two FABC offices, the Office of Human Development and the Office of the Laity. They adapted the South African Lumko method of building BECs to the Asian cultural context and called the adaptation *Asian Integral Pastoral Approach* (ASIPA). With trained country teams and Asian teams to facilitate the training of BEC trainors, BEC building in many parts of Asia became a fixture of the pastoral scenario.

The vision of a local church in triple dialogue through BEC building is becoming a reality. With certain justification, many Asian bishops are now saying that in Asia there is "*a new way of being Church*." This new way consists of a local church that is emerging at the level of Asian grassroots cultures with the following characteristics:

- communities of discipleship
- through the initiative of priests and bishops;
- a church that is a *communion of communities*;
- *a participatory Church* with trained and active lay leaders in communion with their priests and bishop;

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- *a Church of the poor* where rich and poor are in *fellowship, solidarity, and communion*, *sharing with one another*,
- gathered to *pray and share the Word of God, and centered on the Eucharist.*

They call this a new way of being Church but it is certainly modeled after the first Christian community in Jerusalem (see summaries in Acts 2:44–47 and 4:32–36).

It is through these FABC seminars and institutes that dialogue between local churches takes place. As shepherds of their local churches, Asian bishops, together with religious, clergy, and laity, gather to dialogue with one another, sharing experiences, learning from one another, discerning the pastoral situation together, and drawing up effective responses to meet common pastoral problems. These dialogical encounters between local churches entail mutual enrichment, pastoral discernment, and collegial pastoral response in a spirit of friendship and mutual understanding that leads to interpersonal communion.

In so doing, *the dialogue is also a process towards self-realization* (i.e., *becoming truly local church*). This can only take place in Asia because there is a common vision of local church and a common pastoral priority of building BECs.

At the Level of Episcopal Conferences

Becoming a local church in dialogue with other local churches is likewise facilitated by episcopal conferences. The example is the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

In 1990, the CBCP called for a Plenary Council of the Philippines. A year later, from January 20 to February 17, 1991, the bishops of the Philippines, with a large gathering of religious, clergy, and laity from every diocese in the country, came together in Manila. They spent a month together discerning, praying, reflecting, and engaging in dialogue with one another. They built communion amongst themselves, made even deeper with the daily celebration of the sacrament of communion, the Holy Eucharist.

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Although canonically only the bishops had the right to vote, a free participation of all 489 participants in plenary assembly and in workshops was a characteristic feature of the whole Council.

They looked deeply into the national pastoral situation to find out why evangelization did not seem to have succeeded despite 450 years of Christianity in the Philippines. They realized that Filipino Catholics are, indeed, a deeply religious and faith-driven people, proud of their Catholicism, and even sharing it with other peoples in other continents through migrant Filipino workers.

Yet as Filipino Catholics, we have what Fr. Jaime Bulatao, a famous Filipino psychologist, called "split-level Christianity." We observe the traditions, rituals, and customs of our faith at one level but we live our political, economic, and social lives at another level. Faith does not seem to permeate daily life. Faith is split and separated from life, a dichotomy of faith and life which *Gaudium et spes* had called "one of the gravest errors of our time."[6] One Filipino observed that what one famous European prelate had said about their situation may be applied to us: "We are sacramentalized but we are not evangelized."

PCP-II truly celebrated the whole process of discernment and dialogue between local churches such that, at the end, official voting on the final text and resolutions of the Council was enthusiastic and almost always unanimous. Subsequently, the Philippine bishops articulated PCP-II's vision of Church on the road to renewal in the following way:

> **Vision:**
>
> Immersed in a society fragmented by divisive conflicts and afflicted by widespread poverty, yet deeply aspiring for fullness of life in God, we, as Church in the Philippines with total trust in God's love, envision ourselves as a *community of disciples*, who firmly believe in the Lord Jesus and who joyfully live in *harmony and solidarity with one another, with creation, and with God.*

[6] *Gaudium et spes* 43.

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> Following *the way of the Lord*, we opt to be a *Church of the Poor* which demands evangelical poverty of us all and harnesses the transformative power of the poor among us toward the justice and love of God in this world.
>
> **Mission:**
>
> To achieve this vision, under the leading of the Spirit of God and with Mary as our guide, we shall embark on a *renewed evangelization* and *witness to Jesus Christ's Gospel* of salvation and liberation through our words, deeds, and lives.
>
> As Bishops, Priests, Religious, and Laity, we together commit ourselves *to implement the spirit and decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* in order to *inculturate Gospel values* in our milieu. By this shall "*kaayusan*" (order and harmony) be achieved through persons who are "*maka-Diyos, maka-tao, maka-bayan and maka-buhay*."
>
> Ours will then be a civilization of life and love, a sign of the in-breaking of the Father's Kingdom.[7]

Noteworthy are the key concepts in the vision of a Church-in-mission, on the road to renewal: *community of disciples; following the way of the Lord; solidarity with one another, with creation, and with God; Church of the Poor; renewed integral evangelization; witnessing to the Lord's Gospel; inculturation.* As with the FABC, these concepts are fundamental dimensions of becoming a local church in the Philippine context.

Major Pastoral Priorities towards the Vision of Church

After 1991, most dioceses in the Philippines enthusiastically embarked on the journey of renewal—with mixed results. Dioceses in Mindanao continued their work of building Basic Ecclesial Communities. They had been doing so since the momentous gathering

[7]"Vision-Mission Statement of the Church in the Philippines," nos. 1–5. Formulated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on July 23, 1992, the statement is a comprehensive summary of the Acts and Decrees of PCP-II.

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of local churches called the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) in the early 1970s. This dialogue between the local churches was sustained through regular sub-regional assemblies, assemblies of Mindanao-Sulu diocesan clergy, and meetings of pastoral programs such as catechetics, youth, family life, indigenous peoples and social action, and community-based health.

But elsewhere, with no dialogue between local churches (such as those in Mindanao) to help them, a good number of dioceses lost momentum in the movement of church renewal and reverted to their safety zones of pastoral ministry.

Therefore, 10 years after PCP-II, all the Philippine dioceses, represented by 369 delegates (bishops, religious, clergy, and laity), gathered together again in Manila to dialogue in a week-long forum, the National Consultation on Church Renewal (January 22–27, 2001). The Consultation recalled the vision of Church drawn up by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, selecting three key concepts: *community of disciples*, *Church of the Poor*, and *Renewed Integral Evangelization*. Finally, it synthesized the many pastoral thrusts of PCP-II for the Church in the Philippines into 9 major pastoral priorities in order to realize the vision-mission of PCP-II:

- Integral *Faith* Formation
- Empowerment of the *Laity* towards Social Transformation
- Active Presence and Participation of the *Poor* in the Church
- *Family* as the Focal Point of Evangelization
- Building and Strengthening of *Participatory Communities* that make up the Parish as a Community of Communities
- Integral Renewal of *the Clergy and Religious*
- Journeying with the *Youth*

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- Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue
- Animation and Formation for *Mission Ad Gentes*

Excerpts from the Consultation Message, "Behold, I Make All Things New" (Rev. 21:5), indicate what some of the above pastoral priorities mean:

- "(The laity) must be empowered to engage in greater dialogue and discernment with the clergy and religious concerning social, economic, political, and cultural issues, in order to take the leading role in the transformation of society."
- "(To be evangelically poor), we shall seek to liberate ourselves from mentalities, values, behaviors and lifestyles that discriminate against the materially poor."
- "We also recognize that the family is the origin of many cultural distortions that lie at the root of our problems as a people. We shall therefore commit ourselves to a more intensive evangelization of the family, so that the family might become not just object, but agent of proclaiming the Gospel."
- "We shall support the growth and strengthening of Basic Ecclesial Communities and other forms of faith-communities, such as lay associations and movements, as vehicles of renewal. We shall … seek to develop structures of coordination and participatory decision-making."
- "We shall therefore ensure [a] deeper dialogue of life between the clergy and the poor, so that [the] clerical lifestyle may truly witness to poverty after the manner of the poor Christ."
- "We shall engage in a dialogue of life, faith, prayer, and common action (with other ecclesial communities and religious traditions, especially the followers of

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> Islam). As a way to healing, reconciliation and national unity, we shall encourage dialogue among all sectors of society."[8]

One observes from the above how *dialogue* is conceived by the Church in the Philippines as the operative process in the renewal of the local church and society, or as the various sectors of the Church at the Consultation expressed it, "our journey to the new creation we so deeply desire."

A Method of Pastoral Discernment in the Dialogue between Local Churches

In the Church in Asia, a method of pastoral discernment for pastoral decision and planning has been developed. It is used by diocesan pastoral assemblies in many local churches in Asia and by BECs. It is also used by the FABC in its various plenary assemblies and seminars conducted by its offices. It is to be recalled that bishops, priests, religious, and laity from different Asian local churches participate in these assemblies and seminars. One can therefore truly say that it is *a method used in the dialogue between local churches towards discernment, decision, and action*.

The method is a variation or elaboration of the classic "see-judge-act" method. It is called the Pastoral Spiral / Cycle: **Situation** Analysis of the pastoral situation (social/cultural analysis) →→ **Reflection in Faith** (in the light of Sacred Scriptures and the Teachings of the Church) →→ **Pastoral Decision** regarding the situation →→ **Pastoral Planning** to implement the decision →→ **Implementation** →→ **Evaluation** →→ New pastoral situation →→ … [9]

[8]"'Behold, I Make All Things New' (Rev. 21:5): Message of the National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal," no. 7 (January 27, 2001), http://www.cbcponline.net/documents/2000s/html/2001-churchrenewal.html (accessed November 10, 2013).

[9]Joe Holland & Peter Henriot, SJ, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith & Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983/1989), 7–10. The pastoral spiral or

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Every step of the Pastoral Spiral is participatory by way of dialogue. At every stage, the goal is to reach a consensus rather than decide by voting. Therefore, maximum opportunities are provided for dialogue between members of local churches in order to discern and decide together. The method ensures that decisions achieved through dialogue are both rooted in pastoral realities and are also the results of faith-reflection.

Theological Principles in the Dialogue between Local Churches in Asia

From the experience of dialogue between local churches in Asia, operative theological principles are clearly discernible. To be highlighted are the following:

1. Communion

FABC III in Bangkok, 1982, was devoted to the theme of "The Church—A Community of Faith in Asia." Its final statement declared that the "local church must be a community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity, a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around in the Eucharist."[10] The Trinitarian icon of communion, and the contemplative and sacramental dimensions of communion, are fundamental to understanding the very nature of local church. In addition, the Christological image of the Body of Christ (already

circle has its roots in the "see, judge, act" method of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, the "hermeneutic circle" of Juan Luis Segundo, the methodology of modern Catholic Social Teaching, and the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

[10]Final Statement, no. 15, "The Church—A Community of Faith in Asia" (Bangkok, Thailand: October 20–27, 1982), in *FABC Papers* 32 (1982): 30, http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_32.pdf (accessed November 10, 2013).

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expressed in FABC I [Taiwan: 1974], no. 10) reflects the communion of local churches.[11]

FABC I described the communion of all local churches as a communion in one faith, one Spirit, and one sacramental life, a communion of "filial oneness" with the See of Peter:

> (The local church) is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather, it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life. In a special way it rejoices in its communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal church in love.[12]

But the dialogical aspect of the life of local churches in Asia is really one of seeking solidarity with cultures, with various religious traditions, and with Asian peoples, especially the poor, in such a way that Christian communities in Asia would truly be "Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, [and] communicating their own Christ-experience to others."[13]

And so too with communion for mission.

> The renewal of our sense of mission will mean … that the *acting subject of mission* is the *local church living and acting in communion with the universal church*. It is the local churches and communities which can discern and work out (*in dialogue with each other and other persons of good will*) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local churches.[14]

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[11]See Thesis 1, no. 1, in FABC Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), "Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context," *FABC Papers* 60 (1991): 12–13, http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_60.pdf (accessed November 10, 2013).

[12]FABC I Final Statement, no. 11.

[13]Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (Hong Kong: 1977), no. 14.

[14]"Journeying Together toward the Third Millenium," FABC V (Bandung: 1990), no. 3.3.1.

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At the Asian Synod, the bishops spoke of communion for mission, mission of communion, and communion of communities.[15] By so doing, they confirmed and underscored their conviction in the Church as a communion and their vision of making *communion a pervasive reality in the life of the Church in Asia.*

2. Discipleship

The dialogue between local churches is facilitated through their shared discipleship of Christ. This is a point of departure as well as a faith reality that has to be deepened through dialogue. Spirituality is described in terms of discipleship. For the local churches in Asia, the effectiveness and credibility of proclaiming Jesus in the Asian context depends on lived spirituality. And spirituality is one of discipleship, "nothing more and nothing less than following Jesus-in-mission."[16]

A *new way of being Church* in Asia is realized by becoming a "communion of communities"—communities in communion with one another under the sign of Christian discipleship. FABC would state: "It is the Spirit of Jesus that creates the disciple community."[17] This is so because discipleship entails abiding in, living in, and walking with the Spirit of Jesus—being filled with the Spirit and driven by the Spirit (Luke's Gospel is replete with the action of the Holy Spirit in Jesus).

3. Church of the Poor

In a continent where "teeming millions" live in massive and abject poverty, the local churches in Asia deeply desire to be a Church of the poor, in the manner of the poor Christ. The Son of God is the God-made-poor, born poor of parents from an obscure village. As a young itinerant preacher, he called those who were poor to be his first disciples, announced the Reign of God to the poor, called the

[15]*Ecclesia in Asia* 25.

[16]See FABC IV (Tokyo: 1986) and FABC V.

[17]"Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," FABC VI (Manila: 1995), no. 14.

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poor his friends, ate with them, taught them of His Father, and did works of wonder for them. His "compassion for the multitudes" was profound and moved him to minister to them.

Christ's preferential love for the poor is what drives his Asian disciple-communities towards the vision of being a Church of the poor. In this new way of being Church, everyone, rich or poor, is committed to live the spirit of evangelical poverty—living simply and in solidarity with the poor, sharing with them, acting in their defense, and promoting their dignity while eschewing the pomp of this world and its often immoral use of power. It is in this way that the poor become active agents of evangelization, able to harness their resources for God's Kingdom.

4. Co-Responsibility and Participation

In the Asia of the 1970's, the terms "co-responsibility" and "participation" were theological buzzwords flowing from Vatican II. They entered the vocabulary of the local churches as well as the FABC plenary assemblies and seminars. The vocabulary was learned in parish pastoral councils, in clergy meetings and assemblies, in the on-going formation of religious, and in seminaries.

With the adoption of the BEC as a pastoral thrust and vehicle in becoming a new way of being Church, the vocabulary began to see concrete realization at the grassroots level. The training of lay leaders to perform various tasks and ministries for the building up of the community and the faith formation of members called for participatory learning experiences.

These processes meant lay and clergy empowerment, or the activation of charisms that are the special gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Participation in pastoral discernment, in pastoral decision-making, in church activities, in the mission of the Church to evangelize, and in the task of social transformation—these were all fundamental to the pastoral thrust of church renewal. Such desiderata were highlighted by local churches in dialogue with one another through assemblies and seminars.

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The focus of the local churches in Asia regarding co-responsibility is not so much on the shared responsibility of local churches for the one common mission of the Church to evangelize. Their focus is the building of awareness among the laity that the whole Church is in mission. The whole Church, namely bishops, clergy, religious, and laity, shares in the one common mission to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ in Asia.

As FABC I said, "With large expectations, we turn to our lay people also, especially to our catechists …. More and more they must assume responsibility in the task of evangelization."[18]

With their empowerment, trained lay leaders and members of grassroots communities are now participating actively in the renewal of the Church, dialoguing together with their bishops, the clergy, and religious on matters of pastoral governance and ministry, church support services, and the evangelizing mission of the Church.

5. Proclamation, Renewed Integral Evangelization, and the Kingdom of God

From FABC I in Taiwan to FABC IX in Manila, the local churches of Asia in dialogue with one another chose "renewed integral evangelization" as their mission, illumined by the mission of the Church to evangelize, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

In the Church in Asia, there was never any hedging about proclaiming the Lord Jesus as central to mission. Considering the various cultures, religious traditions, and the poverty of Asian peoples, the mode of evangelization would be dialogue.

At the Asian Synod, Pope John Paul II heard from the Asian bishops about the difficulties of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus in a continent that hardly heard of Jesus or much less accepted him. It was Pope John Paul II who wrote that "*the silent witness of life* still remains the only way of proclaiming God's Kingdom in many places

[18]FABC I Final Statement, no. 36.

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in Asia where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted."[19]

In dialogue with one another, the Asian bishops at the Synod spoke of the complex cultural and multi-religious situation and the Asian cultural way of story-telling to drive home a point. Taking up the bishops' reflections, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the proclamation of Jesus has to be evocative, progressive, and gradual, using stories as the Asian Jesus did, until such time, with the guidance of the Spirit, when hearers would be ready to fully appropriate the mystery of Jesus.[20]

In the social, economic, political, and cultural context of Asia, what is most needed is the task of social transformation. In many places and at various times, in FABC plenary assemblies and seminars, in gatherings of local churches to dialogue with one another, the laity's leading role in social renewal would be mentioned and fostered.

The Gospel calls for social transformation. The realities of the Asian continent where "death-dealing forces" in a culture of death abound demand social transformation. Local churches in dialogue at the 1994 FABC Plenary Assembly in Korea had a comprehensive discernment of the Asian death-dealing forces that threaten the Asian family. These ranged from economic and cultural globalization, the feminization of poverty, the phenomenon of a new slavery suffered by migrant workers, and women- and child-trafficking to the instability of families because of war and conflict, the degradation of the environment, and assaults on the Asian family by population control policies.

It is no wonder that, through the use of the pastoral spiral, local churches in Asia make pastoral decisions that integrate the social teachings of the Church in announcing the Good News of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. The multi-religious dimension of Asia also impels the local churches to emphasize the spread of Kingdom values,

[19]*Ecclesia in Asia* 23.

[20]*Ecclesia in Asia* 20.

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so that collaboration with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc., in the task of social transformation would be possible.

Conclusion

Much more could be said about other operative theological principles that surfaced in the dialogue between local churches in Asia as they, at the FABC level, pray, discern, reflect, and decide together on the dynamic interaction between Asian realities and our faith. But the above would provide a glimpse of the dialogue of life and heart, of pastoral and theological exchange, among the local churches in Asia.

The core basis of dialogue between local churches lies in the depths of the Church's identity as a sacrament of communion, a communion of communities, with a mission for communion. These are faith-realities that are "now and not yet."

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