The FABC's Theology of the Laity and its Relevance to Forming Leaders in Asia's Local Churches[1]

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The "laity" was one of the fourteen "megatrends" outlined during the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in December 2012. While the Church of Asia has witnessed significant advances since the Second Vatican Council, internal challenges abide in acknowledging and developing the gifts and charisms of the laity in the functions and tasks required of them by their ministry and apostolate.[2]

As the council mentioned above emphasizes, "They [all the baptized] manifest this special property [*sensus fidei* or sense of the faith]…That discernment…is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of Truth" (*LG,* 12). In other words, by their Baptism and openness to be led by the same Spirit of Truth, the laity possesses the same dignity too and should actively exercise the roles and functions required of their giftedness, even to

1 All references to FABC documents will generally be taken from the four volumes of *For All the Peoples of Asia.* The abbreviation FAPA will be used, followed by the volume number (e.g., 1) and the specific page number(s). The statements of FABC plenary assemblies will have prominence as it is the supreme body of FABC. All the important documents of FABC were published under the following volumes: ed. Gaudencio B. Rosales and Catalino G. Arévalo, *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1991* (hereafter, FAPA I) (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1992). FAPA II, Documents from 1992 to 1996, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1997). FAPA III, Documents from 1997 to 2001, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2002). FAPA IV, *Documents from 2002 to 2006,* ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2007).

2 Cf. FAPA I, no. 57.

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the extent of decision-making in ecclesial structures that affect them. To reinforce this special property, the FABC calls for the mobilization of the laity by the ordained, religious, and lay leaders who underwent formation themselves.

Thus, to be consistent with FABC's vision of a new way of being Church, the local churches of Asia had to come up with creative means of addressing perennial challenges on laity engagement, such as lack of life models, formation, and the pre-Vatican II mentality.[3]

The Institute of Formation-Fondacio (IFF) in Asia responds to FABC's vision of a new way of being Church through an eleven-month intensive formation for young adults in their early 20s to mid-30s. With college students and young professionals as its target audience, IFF significantly contributes to the giftedness of local churches and communities with its unique approach to formation. IFF has established a basic formation program that is inductive, holistic, Christ-centered, communitarian, and missionary.

With the FABC and IFF's ideals in congruence, the author aims to use the former's Theology of the Laity as a framework to affirm the impact of its core ideals on the latter's basic formation program. Consequently, the author also intends to reflect on the areas of the program that require further institutional and internal developments. By doing so, this study would offer a new way of perceiving charism, vocations, and ministry under one ecosystem of grace. The areas of the formation program that resonated with FABC's teachings are the following: 1) Understanding of Renewal or Vision of New Way of Being Church; 2) Formation of Laity, and the Underlying Vision of the Human Person; 3) Relation

3 Adolfo Nicolas, "The Laity in the Life and Mission of the Church" *East Asian Pastoral Review* 27/3 (1986): 209.

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to Local Church or Ecclesiology; 4) Mission and Integral Evangelization; and 5) Method of Approach or Pedagogy. These will be discussed per section below.

FABC – IFF Asia's Understanding of Renewal or Vision of a New Way of Being Church

The FABC adopts Vatican II's *People of God* ecclesial image and its emphasis on the common priesthood as the foundation and springboard for its Theology of the Laity. The laity are called to live and share Christ as accorded by their Christian identity and participate in the integral evangelizing mission of the Church. Holiness, a gift divinely imparted through Baptism and fortified through Confirmation and the Eucharist, is necessary to follow and imitate Christ: "Whoever wants to follow me must take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34).

Thus, in fostering the mission of the laity, the FABC identified three main concepts mainly "communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility" (FAPA I [FABC IV, 1986, art. 45.1-2] 193). Additionally, the collegial body stressed that for the laity to live out their common priesthood after Christ's Paschal Mystery, they must be formed on the "New Way of Being Church in Asia." This spiritual formation is further described as participatory, prophetic, dialoguing, and communitarian.

For their part, Fondacio and IFF Asia actualize Vatican II's spirit of renewal by identifying with the "joys, hope, griefs, and anxieties" (*GS,* 1) of the world. Their spirituality is of communion and mission that aspires to convert, dialogue, develop, and form interfaith and ecumenical relationships. Akin to this spiritual formation is the practice of the "dying of the self" (cf. Fondacio Charter), which is nonetheless a creative and faithful attempt to imitate Christ's Paschal

Mystery. Apparently, this resonates with FABC's spirituality of the *anawim*.

The IFF Asia, in particular, envisions to be "a hub of formation for the laity, for a renewed Asian Church and Society." [4] Through its basic formation program, IFF Asia assists in awakening the seeds planted by the Spirit in everyone baptized. To bring about new vocations and forms of ministries, IFF Asia situates itself in the same lineage and mission as FABC.

FABC – IFF Asia Formation of Laity and Vision of the Human Person

With the vision and background in mind from which it was founded, IFF Asia (and Fondacio) forms disciples and witnesses[5] who would embark on a journey of awareness and discovery of the self, of others, of God, and of the world in general (Fondacio Charter; GS). As catalysts of change in their own local communities (IFF Asia Reports 2006-2009, 2009-2012), they are prodded by Fondacio to believe and seek the potential and goodness in each person. In relation to FABC's aim for promoting a new way of being Church, a review of formation can be carried out in seminaries, religious houses, and lay institutes to see how the essentialities are internalized by those who are being formed (i.e., preachers, formators, and

4 IFF Asia, *Vision Mission: Report 2006 – 2009*.

5 IFF Asia's mission-vision statement conveys that forming a "living community of disciples" is at the heart of the organization.

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teachers). [6] To show another similarity between the institute and FABC, a brief discussion of selected FABC plenary assemblies is summarized below.

First Plenary Assembly (1974)

Missionary formation is experiential or inspired by encounters with the Lord in the community. Attentiveness to prayer and contemplation, knowledge of Asian philosophies and ideological currents that attract the youth, skills in social inquiry, understanding of the dynamics of national development, and attainment of new methods and techniques for personal and group formation (FAPA I [FABC I, arts. 30-33] 16-17) were some of the pastoral ideas from the first FABC Plenary Assembly (PA).

Meanwhile, the areas of concern for evangelization include many groups (such as the youth, women, families, indigenous peoples, migrants, and refugees), industries, and various private and public sectors (education, health, media, business, and politics).

Third Plenary Assembly (1982)

Formation requires collaboration. The third FABC PA called for a personal, theological, and pastoral formation

6 Parker Palmer is a writer, teacher, and activist who is a senior associate of the American Association for Higher Education. He writes, "we teach who we are" and invites into a deeper inquiry about education — teaching and learning — that is often overlooked. It is not the "what" question (what subjects shall we teach?) nor the "how" question (what methods and techniques are required?) nor the "why" question (for what purpose and to what ends do we teach?). It is the "who" question: who is the self that teaches? Parker Palmer explores the inner landscape of the teacher's life along three related pathways — intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. Further reading is available at http://www.uua.org/re/teachers/inspiration/15408.shtml (accessed on 03 August, 2013).

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that involves a mutual catechesis amongst bishops, priests, religious peoples, and lay people (FAPA I [FABC III, arts. 9-9.4] 57-58). The Asian bishops mentioned in particular, the laity's abilities to form themselves (FAPA I [FABC IV, art. 4.7.2] 194-195). Thus, three levels of formation were outlined: 1) a general formation in the spirit of Vatican II, 2) a formation program for lay volunteers and selected leaders; 3) and ministerial formation for the charismatic individuals in the ecclesial service (FAPA I [FABC IV, art. 4.7.2] 194-195).

Fifth and Seventh Plenary Assemblies (1990 and 2000)

Formation in the social doctrines and of persons of dialogue for the Church and the world necessitates awareness of Asia's social, economic, and religious situations. Formation, in this context, should be sustained, notably when collaborating with competent lay leaders. Otherwise, the vision of a truly Asian Church will not be achieved (FAPA I [FABC V, arts 7.1-7.3.2.3], 284-286).

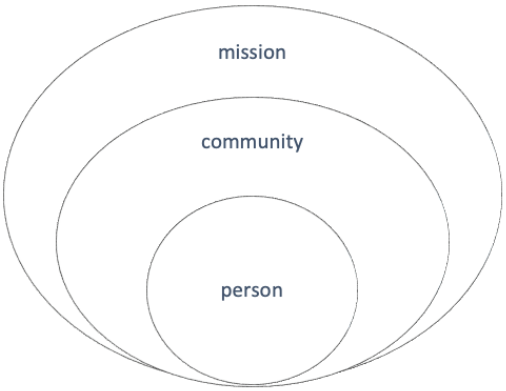
Sustainability and follow-through in formation of the lay people are consequential to attracting candidates to the ordained and consecrated life.[7] This partnership brings into memory the biblical image of the Church as the Body of Christ — no one exists without the other.

7 Ministry is a concern of the local community. Cyprian demands this right as being of divine origin, i.e. as belonging to the nature of a 'community of God', even against Pope Stephen. Cf. Cyprian, Epist. 67.4; 61.3; 73.7; Epist. 4.5; as quoted by Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry, Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 40.

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The Specifics of the Three Stages of Formation as is Practiced

Diagram: The Unfolding and Alignment of the Person, Community, and Mission in Christ



This part shall demonstrate how the FABC principles above are to be applied in the institute. For one, formation entails annual reviews and consultations within local Churches, month-long mission programs, and exposure-immersion to the poor and other faiths. These examples help to make formation more contextual, responsive, and missionary. The formation journey is divided into three stages namely: pre, during, and post-formation stages. In IFF Asia, the intensive formation is aptly called a "basic formation".

The FABC's "helping to emerge" stage in formation is seen in IFF's efforts to prepare students and respond to local bishops' requests to form the young and the laity. The institute has also been sharing tools and human resources (i.e., staff and alumni) to animate camps and ground sessions. Thus, with the help of an established alumni network, this stage is further developed in the coming years by decentralizing parts of the formation program to other countries.

The second stage is a year-long formation at the Manila branch. Here, the students learn objectives, content, and methods that can be applied to their own communities. The last stage in formation is an action-oriented service/internship. This is complemented by annual staff visits and sharing experiences with the alumni and hosts. Scholarships for further studies and internships at IFF Asia are then offered to graduates with a proven track record in leadership and service. The objective is to enable lay workers to grow their gifts and specialize in the fields God willed for them. Furthermore, graduates are also invited to meet the people of the network and join in mission projects and fundraising activities. [8] Through these initiatives, IFF Asia contributes to the emergence of new vocations and ministries.

FABC – IFF Asia Experience of Local Church or Ecclesiology

For this part, the author turns to selected plenary assemblies once more for teachings on an Asian experience of the local Church or ecclesiology.

First Plenary Assembly (1974)

For a truly local and Asian church, it must know its identity and its present realities. As stated in its theology, "the local Church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, in a given place and time" (FAPA I, [FABC 1, 1974, arts 9-12], 14). This theology connotes that the basis for success is formation over the juridical act: "the local Church is not truly established… until there is a laity worthy of its name" (*AG*, 21).

8 See IFF Asia, *Deepening Discipleship: Laity in Mission: Report 2009-2012* (Quezon City: Fondacio Asia, 2010), 22-25.

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Fourth and Fifth Plenary Assemblies (1986 and 1990)

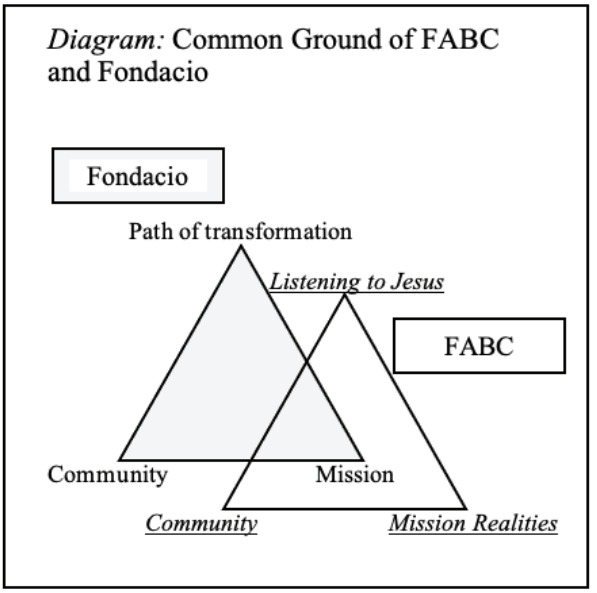
The lay apostolate has been labeled as "parish-oriented, inward-looking, and priest-directed." Hence, a reorientation is called for in which the local Church is not only the parish church but a subject of mission in a given milieu. It becomes a truly local Church if its lay force is reoriented to sharing its talents outside the comforts of a parish (FAPA I, [FABC V, 1990, arts 3.3.1-3], 281). Just as ministries are evolving and pluriform, the Asian bishops affirm that the laity has charisms to exercise publicly (ACMC, 1977).

In the Fondacio Charter, each baptized is recognized for one's co-responsibility and co-creatorship. Incorporating these as one rule in the institute, the students are to wear their communitarian and missionary spirit to become active subjects of faith and mission. Consequently, the spirituality of communion drives them to collaborate with other local Churches, institutions, and industries. Time and resources are spent on their formation to contribute to their own communities effectively.

On a related note, FABC's New Way of Being Church (prophetic, dialoguing, participatory, and communitarian) resonates deeply with the spirituality and vision of the IFF Asia and Fondacio. Staff and members share that they left the security of their jobs in the secular world to serve their brothers and sisters. Similarly, many students are assisted in their local Churches on a full-time basis, while alumni with special charisms are invited to discern and commit to a regular and permanent full-time service. However, the institute is still young, and the mission context across Asia has changed rapidly. Hence, there is a constant need to uncover

the richness of the FABC's theology in the lives of the staff, students, and formation programs.

FABC—IFF Asia Understanding of Mission as Integral Evangelization



In FABC's theology (in unity with Vatican II's), the proclamation of the Reign of God is the highest priority of mission and evangelization of all peoples of Asia. This priority is integrated into a tripartite dialogue with cultures, religions, and the poor in the continent.

The tripartite listening (to Jesus, the community, and mission realities) is similar to Fondacio's path of personal, communal, and missionary transformation in Christ. IFF Asia initiates and forms young adults in this integral formation.

In response to the FABC's living out the triple office of Christ (priest, prophet, and king), Fondacio perceives its mission as promoting the Gospel to contemporaries and forming workers for the Kingdom.

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The actualization of Fondacio's mission is reflected in IFF's 2012 report. Accordingly, there was an 88% increase in commitment and involvement of young adults and alumni to their own local Churches. To name a few, they engaged themselves in evangelization, interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, catechetical formation, social development, relief services, advocacy programs, pastoral care for HIV-AIDS patients and migrants, and building basic ecclesial communities (BEC).[9] Thus, in writing, Fondacio's mission receives affirmation from FABC.

FABC—IFF Asia Program Method or Pedagogy

The Asian bishops recommend using the see-judge-act method to evaluate social realities in light of the Gospel and to recommend concrete acts for resolution. This method is inductive, experiential, and pastoral. Furthermore, its distinctive principles evoke historical liberation, integral human development, preferential option for the poor, and bottom-up ecclesiology.[10] Recently, the FABC has set up the ASIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) under the leadership of the laity office to promote a more participatory Church.

IFF Asia's program thrust and content cover "five fundamental components"[11] aligned to Fondacio's vision of holistic formation and "building blocks."[12] This is to help in the emergence of personhood and discipleship before one's transition to the agency of renewal and mission. The journey is not a linear process but a spiral one. IFF Asia also adopts the

9 See IFF Asia, *Deepening Discipleship,* 67.

10 Peter Hai, "Evaluation of the FABC Theology of the Laity," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 47/3 (2010).

11 Five fundamental components are conducted or designed in module form (human, social, spiritual/theological, pastoral).

12 Building block is the manner in which the topics are structured and linked; starting with those that address the inner life of persons, to those that deal with socio-pastoral skills.

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pastoral cycle, promotes exposure-immersion in its modules, and combines it with experiential learning.

The modules, community living, accompaniment, and prayer life are designed as one pedagogy of Christian life. However, IFF Asia will need to deepen its grasp of various formation tools, learn more about theology and spirituality, and promote the engagement of its staff and students with the poor of Asia. This recommendation, in turn, would be IFF Asia's contextualization of discipleship.[13]

Formation for Ministries in Asia

The renewal of the Asian Church and society requires creative responses to "emerging needs that go beyond the confines of Church or parochial apostolate." The FABC mentions ministries for street children, migrants, refugees, marginalized, tribes and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the FABC recommends a multi-directional ministerial growth from liturgical to service of life; parochial to trans-parochial; and intra-ecclesial to extra-ecclesial.[14]

The IFF Asia's (and Fondacio's) response to the New Way of Being Church is to target young adults and professionals and engage them on a path of discipleship. The institute equips them with the personal, pastoral, and professional skills they need to be effective in their respective states of life.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, this study will show the impact of the FABC's Theology of the Laity on IFF Asia's basic formation program for young adults. Formation

13 Schillebeeckx says Christians need to listen in obedience to the suffering of human beings and the seeds of a Christian community, and then perform specific actions in conformity to this 'voice of God.' See *Ministry. Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ,* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 103.

14 FABC Paper 81: "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," 78-79 (A Document of the Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences).

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is anchored on a sound and responsive theology to achieve its desired outcomes, especially the realization of God's reign in the missionary Church's various evangelization efforts (FAPA I, [BIMA I, art. 5], 292). The author contends that there is a congruence between IFF Asia's vision with the FABC's New Way of Being Church — both bodies emphasize communion, discipleship, and rootedness in Christ and in Asian realities (BILA IV, 1986). Furthermore, IFF Asia strives towards greater incarnation of discipleship through constant review and evaluation of its program content and methodology.

Other than that, Fondacio strives to assist persons from various walks of life in entering into a living relationship with Christ. The stages of forming the students in the institute do not end with completing the program. Rather, the formation program finds sustenance in the Spirit[15] to reach spiritual maturation and to discover one's vocation. However, Fondacio admits that it cannot provide all means. Like other ecclesial movements, Fondacio only acts as an activator of one's path to discipleship.

In its formation program, Fondacio aspires for its students:

- to become a new creation through the actualization of one's baptismal grace;
- to live and share in Christ's threefold office in one's state of life;
- to rediscover ecclesial dignity by participating actively in the local Church, with the network created at Fondacio and other ecclesial movements;
- to accept one's mission wherever it may be.

15 *What Is the Spirit Telling Us?* Stages of Growth – draft 2, 2008 (Internal doc). See also IFF Asia, *Deepening Discipleship,* 30.

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To achieve this, IFF Asia offers a unique model for lay formation anchored on the following theological concepts:

- Tripartite Model of Engagement: Local Church, Student, and IFF Asia;
- Tri-Dimensions of Formation: the Human Person, Community, and Mission;
- Three Pearls of Formation: Spirituality of Blessing and Docility to the Spirit, Lay Discipleship in Today's Context, and Integrated Formation.

An Eco-System of Charism, Vocation, and Ministry

Through formation and service, each human person can rediscover and develop their God-given gifts. The megatrends (i.e., youth, women, etc.) in Asian societies will have become the learning grounds for religious communities. Antonio Maria Sicari mentions that religious institutes tend to keep their charism as an exclusive property, thus, preventing the lay from discovering their own. Additionally, he also laments the negligence and lack of trust of lay members in various congregations (i.e., third order).[16] Hence, to address both poles, Sicari recommends the existence of "a charismatically formed laity" at the base level[17] by nudging the religious and the ordained to open up the "charismatic deposits" stored for centuries.[18]

Applying Sicari's analysis to the analogy of the garden, the seeds of vocations planted by the Spirit would not bloom because of the strict separation among the states of life. There exist strong dividing walls within which each vocation exclusively promotes and protects their own. There are intensive efforts to weed out; but through time, some have grown to

16 Antonio M. Sicari, "Ecclesial Movements: A New Framework for Ancient Charisms," *Communio* 29 (Summer 2002): 288-291.

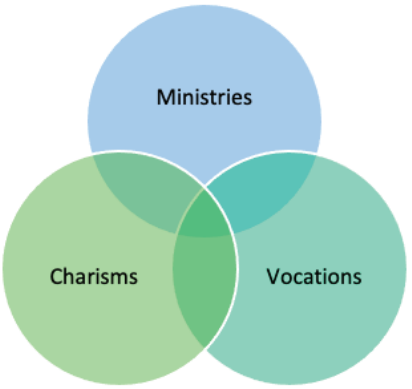
17 Sicari, "Ecclesial Movements," 296.

18 Ibid., 298.

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become self-occupied. Eventually, the quantity and quality of vocations would dwindle. There is hunger in the land.

Diagram: An Eco-System of Grace for the Church



Cross-fertilization and reciprocity of charisms, vocations, ministries; and the various states of life among the People of God.

Healthy vocations and ministries blossom from the sharing and free flow of talents and resources. An ecosystem of grace (charism, vocations, ministries) exists in the garden of the People of God. The ordained, religious, and the lay receive sustenance from the Gardener—Christ. When a part of the system is neglected, isolated, or suppressed (i.e., the laity), it affects the whole. From the common priesthood flows the equality and dignity of vocations. This is what Peter Hai calls an "interdependency" among vocations. [19]

Vatican II calls for every baptized to use their spiritual gifts to build the Church's life. In the words of John Paul II,

19 Peter Hai, "Evaluation of the FABC Theology of the Laity," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 47/3 (2010): 237.

the "institutional and charismatic are equally essential aspects of the Church's constitution and work together, in different ways, to build up the Church's life, to foster its renewal, and to promote the sanctification of the people of God."[20] The existence of various ecclesial and social movements after Vatican II connotes that ministries are not uniform. To be called a Servant Church, our Church needs more people to be reached through new forms and expressions of the Gospel (FAPA I [ACMC, art. 114] 88).

The bishops continue to convince themselves that the Church in Asia will "grow into her true self only if the love and service of Christ becomes more evident to all" (FAPA I [ACMC, 1977, art. 130] 91).

Systems Thinking and Learning Organizations

The awakening of civil society across the globe tells that people long for self-actualization and fulfillment.[21] In the language of the Church, each person groans for all creation

20 John Paul II, *Address on the Occasion of the Meeting of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities,* Speeches, 30 May 1998. See Pontifical Council for the Laity, *Movements in the Church. Proceedings of the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements, Rome,* May 1998. (Rome: Vatican Press, 1998), 3.

21 Andre Rochais, the founder of PRH *(Personnalité et Relations Humaines),* writes of the "deposit of potentialities and therefore of creativity which is latent in the innermost depths of every being…. Everything is there, in this sub-stratum of Humanity, in this sub-stratum of men and women of this planet, everything is there to form a more human world." PRH believes therefore, the movement of "centering on oneself" leads to an opening toward "more than self", because beyond race, culture and religion, one reaches the shore of what is most "common" and most universal in all humanity, the perception of a profound and true humanity. If such is the case, PRH argues that the growth of persons is not only one value to be recognized among others. It becomes "the No. 1 value of a human society." Taken seriously and on a vast scale, it can foster greater personalization and greater humanization of society. See Personality and Human Relations, Persons and Their Growth (Poitiers, France: Personnalité et Relations Humaines – International, January 1997), 264-265.

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to come into fullness (cf. Rom 8:19-21). Furthermore, Peter Senge reminds us that liberation is not individualistic, but rather collective.[22] In the context of formation, problems cannot be solved through band aid solutions. Senge suggests three guidelines for groups to become an organic whole: 1) the primacy of the whole, 2) the communal nature of the self, and the 3) generative power of language. In the first guideline, he highlights the importance of the unity of the whole, while in the second and third guidelines, he turns to relationships and uses the language of human experience in reading social trends and factors.[23]

In the context of lay formation, the primacy of the whole reinforces the need to hold the total ecclesiology of Vatican II and FABC, while the communal nature of the self and the generative power of language applies to the maturation of the Christian vocation in communities and in reading the signs of the times. The Church must pray collectively for the prophetic spirit of courage to inspire new interpretations and possibilities. When this Spirit is lacking in the Church, she slips back into dysfunctional clericalism and legalism.[24]

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the influence of the FABC's Theology of the Laity on IFF Asia's formation program. This

22 This remark of Peter Senge captures the need of the times. See "Navigating Webs of Interdependence," IBM *Social Media,* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOPfVVMCwYg (accessed on 27 July 2013).

23 Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 24-27.

24 Giulia Cirillo, "Pope Francis: Without Prophecy, only Clericalism," *Archivio Radio Vaticana,* 16 December 2013, http://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2013/12/16/pope_francis_without_prophecy,_only_clericalism/en1-756052 (accessed on 29 December 2013).

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was achieved by comparing the critical teachings of FABC with the program and practices of the said institute. The author points out the need to live out one's priesthood consciously and inform the local communities of the pivotal teachings of FABC. By doing so, the lay would be able to understand the centrality of proclaiming the Reign of God and take proactive roles in discipleship and liberation efforts.

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