

LAITY AND CHURCH

In the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

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IN THE YEARS since the Second Vatican Council, especially after the promulgation in 1972 of Paul VI's Apostolic Letter *Ministeria Quaedam*,¹ inviting episcopal conferences to request the establishment of new ministries from the Holy See, lay apostolic activity has flourished in the Church.² National conferences of bishops have also issued numerous statements in support of lay ministries.³

In Asia, at the 'Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church' in 1977 the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (hereafter FABC) listed more than forty types of lay ministries and predicted that more ministries would emerge in response to the needs of particular communities.⁴ Nine years later, in 1986, the Catholic bishops of Asia devoted an entire Fourth Plenary Assembly to examine the question of the vocation and mission of lay people in the Church and in the world of Asia.⁵

For the Asian bishops, lay people *qua* Asian Christians are as integral to the Church as the clergy. Hence, the source of their vision for lay responsibility can be found in their understanding of the life, nature, and purpose of the Church.⁶ Indeed, their theology of the laity reflected a particular ecclesiology that had been discussed in detail at the Third Plenary Assembly in 1982, under the theme of 'The Church—A Community of Faith in Asia.'⁷

This paper will first review the development of the FABC's ecclesiology and its theology of the laity. It will then conclude with a comparative summary of these two theologies under the themes of vocation, mission, theological development, and methodology.

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The FABC's Theology of the Church

Back in the mid-1970s the Catholic bishops of Asia foresaw that, by the turn of the 20th century, an estimated 60% of the world population would live in Asia. It was also evident that Asia would remain the least Christian continent in numerical terms. Therefore, in their view, it was imperative that Asian Churches discover their own vocation and become 'genuine Christian communities in Asia—Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others.'⁸

Later, the FABC revisited this theme at the Third Plenary Assembly, this time providing a fuller treatment of the subject by reflecting on the nature and structures of the Church, in particular the local Church and basic ecclesial communities. For the Asian bishops, the Church is a community of faith in Asia, 'a community realizing its communion and mission in its own being and life, and in relation to other communities.'⁹ At its deepest level, the Church is 'a communion rooted in the life of the Trinity,' and essentially 'a sacrament of the loving self-communication of God' and the graced response of redeemed people in faith, hope and charity.¹⁰

Throughout their discourse on the imperatives of the Church in Asia, the Asian bishops emphasise the Christological, pneumatological, and Trinitarian basis of their ecclesiology. First, they encourage Asian theologians to develop a cosmic Christology of harmony, because such a Christology will engender a cosmic ecclesiology that moves beyond its institutional attention 'to understand the Church essentially as a centrifugal Church, open to the whole universe and present in and for the

universe.¹¹ Second, their ecclesiology espouses Vatican II's teaching on the Church as community of believers filled with the living Spirit,¹² and stresses that the Spirit is the church's life principle.¹³ For the FABC, the mission of the Spirit is inseparable from that of the Father and the Son¹⁴: the Spirit makes Christians one by incorporating them into the one body of Christ and leads them to the kingdom of God.¹⁵ The church, according to the FABC, is a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ It is essentially 'a communication which flows out of the communication of the Trinity.'¹⁷ Its mission, affirms the FABC, is the *missio Dei*,¹⁸ the very mission of the Trinity. We note that the christological and pneumatological basis of the FABC's ecclesiology discussed above underlines its contextual character,¹⁹ by a constant reference to the Gospel and an emphasis on the social context,²⁰ coupled with a reading of the signs of the times discerned as promptings and movements of the Holy Spirit. The trinitarian dimension, on the other hand, highlights its relational aspect by stressing the theme of the church as a community of faith rooted in the perfect communion of the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

After the Third Plenary Assembly in 1982, the FABC increasingly turned its attention toward promoting a new way of being Church in Asia,²¹ which is expressed by four ecclesiological dimensions: Church as communion-in-mission,²² as community of dialogue and solidarity,²³ as basic ecclesial communities,²⁴ and as community of disciples.²⁵ Discipleship, declared the FABC, 'is a new paradigm for understanding the Church.'²⁶ This concept of discipleship is premised on the intertwined ideas of trinitarian communion, fellowship with other believers, solidarity with all peoples, mission as service to life, and 'mission as sacrament of peace and harmony.'²⁷

While the Asian bishops already called for an in-depth study of the theology of harmony in the Asian context in 1984,²⁸ only in 1995 did they develop the initial contours of a theology of harmony, and also 'an ecclesiology



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of harmony' by a triple theological process: first, by reading the ongoing conflicts and growing disharmony in Asian societies as signs of the times, and taking stock of the various attempts at promoting harmony; second, by reflecting on the meaning of harmony in Asian cultures, philosophies, and religions as well as in the Bible and Church traditions; third, by rereading the Gospels to discover 'a Cosmic Christology of harmony,' and crafting a theology and spirituality of harmony as the basis for an active commitment to harmony and rationale for Asian collaboration.²⁹ From this 'vision of Christ as the sacrament of new harmony' the FABC proposed the metaphors of the Church as the 'Sacrament of Harmony' and as 'the Servant-Sacrament of Harmony.'³⁰ These images originate from two of Vatican II's ecclesiological models: the Church as the sacrament of unity and the Church as 'servant of the Kingdom.'³¹ We note that these metaphors are already implied in the bishops' basic understanding of the Church as a community of faith in Asia, as communion-in-mission, and as community of discipleship.

For the Asian bishops, evangelisation is the primary task and the highest priority for the church,³² whose purpose is to build up the kingdom of God.³³ Its mission is directed to the world,³⁴ and its mode 'a triple dialogue of life' with the cultures, the religions, and the poor,³⁵ with a focus on the promotion of social justice.³⁶ Therefore, lay people must continue 'to share zealously in the mission of the Church as a leaven in the world and as a sign of the Reign of God.'³⁷

The FABC's Theology of the Laity

Indeed, this theme was explored in depth at the Fourth Plenary Assembly on the vocation and mission of lay people in the Church and in the world of Asia.³⁸ First, for the FABC, lay people first and foremost are Asian Christians, a contextual reality and constitutive part of the Church, the faithful, the disciples of Christ, the people of God, and the believing community. Their identity is based on the baptismal, common priesthood of life, characterised by the Asian secularity. Their calling is intimately bound to the vocation of local Churches where all Asian Christians are called to a contextualised communion by being committed to Jesus the Liberator and to live the priesthood of life in a communion of integral liberation. Their mission and ministries are essentially Christ-centred, kingdom-focused, world-oriented, liberative, and dialogical as they endeavour to actualise the priestly, prophetic, and pastoral functions in their faith response to the challenges of Asia. For the FABC, the entire people of God are priestly, and their common priesthood of life, which has its origins in Christ himself, is more real and inclusive than the ministerial priesthood of the clergy. Mission is the purpose of ministries, and evangelisation is the highest priority of mission.³⁹ Proclamation is the centre and primary element of evangelisation,⁴⁰ and the ultimate goal of evangelisation is to build up the kingdom of God by a triple dialogue with the religions, cultures and the poor of Asia.⁴¹

Consistent with the contextual orientation of their theology, the Asian bishops have endeavoured to remain faithful to the Gospel, the tradition, and the teachings of Vatican II,⁴² and at the same time, maintained creativity in adapting these teachings to the situations in Asia. Their theology also has a markedly relational approach. Indeed, for the FABC, underlying the articulation of the vocation and mission of lay people is their relationship with Christ and their role *vis-à-vis* the Church and the world.⁴³ Lay people and the entire Christian community are called to a communion

with Jesus the Liberator, a communion of committed disciples working for the liberation of Asia, which is rooted in the realities of Asia and in solidarity with the peoples of Asia.

A striking feature of the FABC's theology of the laity is that there has been a fundamental continuity and a gradual progression in this theology since 1970, the inception date of the FABC,⁴⁴ which displays a high degree of consistency and integration, coupled with discernible elements of growth.⁴⁵ Indeed, this contextual theology, developed in response to the challenges of Asian societies, has increasingly been manifested by an orientation to the world, a more regional contextualisation of the role of lay people, a move towards their empowerment and greater autonomy, a focus on their integral formation, and an emphasis on a deeper and more engaging spirituality of discipleship and harmony.

Ecclesiological Foundations of the FABC's Theology of the Laity

The figure below aims to highlight the correlation between the Asian bishops' ecclesiology and their theology of the laity. This correlation is important in two ways. First, the bishops of Asia do not emphasise the institutional, clerical or juridical aspect of the Church. This point is not merely terminological; it is substantive. For the issues at stake in defining the role of the laity in the Asian Church are neither exhausted nor chiefly determined by their relationship to the Church as institution, as clergy, and as hierarchy. Our argument is that to correctly understand the FABC's view of the role of the laity one has to restate the question in terms of its fuller understanding of the Church, as in 'the role of lay people in the Church as a community of faith in Asia,' 'the role of lay people in the Church as communion in mission,' 'the role of lay people in the Church as dialogue and solidarity,' 'the role of lay people in the Church as disciple-community,' 'the role of lay people in the Church as basic ecclesial communities,' and 'the role of lay people in the Church as sacrament of peace and harmony.' In any of these consid-

erations the role of the laity ceases to be reduced to a mere discussion of their specific role, rights, and responsibilities as compared to those of the clergy and hierarchy. Lay people are no longer pitted against the clergy and their mutual relationship is not one that is

driven by opposition and tension. Secondly, as lay people are defined as Asian Christians—a term that includes the clergy—in the Church viewed primarily as a community of faith in Asia, the role of the laity and the role of the Church are closely integrated.

**Ecclesiological Foundations of the FABC’s Theology of the Laity:
A Comparative Summary**

	Theology of the Laity	Ecclesiology
Topics	Themes and Concepts	
Vocation	The laity, as Asian Christians, are called to a communion with Jesus and a communion of liberation	The Church, as a community of faith in Asia, is called to a communion with the Triune God and a discipleship in the Gospel
Mission	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Christ-centred: triple messianic function: priestly, prophetic, pastoral 2. Kingdom-focused 3. World-oriented 4. Dialogical 5. Liberative 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evangelisation 2. Building up God’s kingdom 3. Mission to the world 4. Mission as triple dialogue 5. Social justice
Development	<p>After FABC IV (1986) more emphasis on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. World orientation 2. Contextualisation based on geographical regions 3. Empowerment of lay people 4. Integral formation <i>of and for</i> lay people 5. Spirituality of authentic discipleship and harmony 	<p>After FABC III (1982) more emphasis on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Church as communion-in-mission to the world 2. Church as dialogue and solidarity 3. Church as disciple-community 4. Basic Christian communities as a new way of being Church in Asia 5. Church as sacrament of peace and harmony
Methodology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contextual: faithful to Vatican II and adapting to the Asian context 2. Relational: triple relationship with Christ, the Church, and the world 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contextual: faithful to the living presence of Christ (Christological), and attentive to the signs of the times discerned as promptings of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatological) 2. Relational: Trinitarian

As a summary the table here presented contains only generalisations, and at times the pieces do not nicely fit. However, it hopes to offer a theological spectrum that can assist in the appreciation of the Asian bishops' theology of the laity and their ecclesiology. This figure shows that there is a surprising convergence in both content and structure between their theologies of the laity and of the Church. It underlines the mutual influence of these theological endeavours: the bishops' treatment of the vocation and mission of lay people is based on their ecclesiology, which, in turn, reflects a theological insight and a contextual sensibility that is sharpened by their investigation into the role of the laity as Asian Christians.

For the FABC, not only faith, but faith, hope, and love are the Christian experience

and the starting point for theology. In this sense, theology is not merely an endeavour to understand the faith, but also a concrete realisation of the Christian hope and love, in short, a *praxis*; that is, it seeks not just to understand, but to transform.⁴⁶ The Church, as a communion-in-mission, a community of dialogue and solidarity, a disciple-community, and a sacrament of peace and harmony, is not only a community of faith, but is also a community of faith, hope, and charity in Asia. This community in turn is concretised and historically realised in basic ecclesial communities, the seedbed of a Church totally geared to the evangelising mission. As such, the FABC's theologies of the laity and of the Church together offer one of the best examples of contextualising the theology of Vatican II.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a comparative analysis of the FABC's theologies of the Church and of the laity under four categories of vocation, mission, development, and methodology. It demonstrates that there is a convergence of thought between these two theologies, highlighting their interaction and suggesting that the Church and the laity share in the same mission. Indeed, when Pius XII first lent the Church's authority to the exalted dignity of the laity by declaring in 1946 that lay people are the Church,⁴⁷ he formally brought to an end to a theological and pastoral tendency to treat them as merely passive members of the Church. Over the next fifty years, inspired by Vatican II's constitutions *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and in particular the degree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the the-

ology of the laity took on a new course. In the hands of the Catholic bishops of Asia it is intimately linked to their contextual ecclesiology and unifies their teaching on the Church's evangelising mission with such deep insights as the triple dialogue of life and basic ecclesial communities. In fact, the Asian bishops have scarcely issued an official statement where the theme of evangelisation did not dominate. It is the basis of their entire theology, which places particular emphasis on the role of the laity as Asian Christians in carrying out the Church's mission in the world. In the FABC's rich ecclesiology, lay people are the principal agents of the Church's redemptive mission in the world. They are not the bridge in the world; they are the Church in the world.

NOTES

1 Paul VI, 'Ministeria Quaedam, 15 August 1972: Apostolic Letter on First Tonsure, Minor Orders and the Subdiaconate,' in *Vatican II: Vol. 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1976) 427-32.

2 According to Peter Hebblethwaite, by granting episcopal conferences the 'freedom to experiment' this Apostolic Letter had led to a 'ministry explosion' in the 1980s. See *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1994) 599.

3 See, for examples, U.S. Bishops, 'Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity, 1980, Reflections of the U.S. Bishops,' *Origins* 10:24 (27 November 1980) 369, 371-3; 'Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium,' *Origins* 25:24 (30 November 1995) 409-15; 'Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,' *Origins* 35:25 (1 December 2005) 405-27; *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions: A Report of the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on the Laity, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999); Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *The Sign We Give: Report from the Working Party on Collaborative Ministry* (Chelmsford, Essex: Matthew James Publishing, 1995).

4 FABC, 'Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church' [hereafter APMC], arts. 58-70, 57, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 79-81. The FABC consists of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences in South, Southeast, East and Central Asia, and comprises member conferences from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar, Pakistan, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan (ROC), Thailand, and Vietnam. The ecclesiastical jurisdictions of Hong Kong (SAR), Macao, Mongolia, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Siberia (Russia) enjoy associate membership. All of the important documents of the FABC issued between 1970 and 2006 were published in the following four volumes: *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1, ed. G.B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, Documents from 1992 to 1996*, vol. 2, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997); *For All the*

Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Documents from 1997 to 2001, vol. 3, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002); *For All the Peoples of Asia: FABC Documents from 2002 to 2006*, vol. 4, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2007). These volumes will be cited as *FAPA Vol. 1*, *FAPA Vol. 2*, *FAPA Vol. 3*, and *FAPA Vol. 4*, with the eight FABC Plenary Assemblies cited being referred to as FABC I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII. FABC's offices and study institutes quoted in this article will be abbreviated as follows: Office of Evangelization (OE), Office of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), Office of Human Development (OHD), Office of Education & Student Chaplaincy (OESC), Office of Laity (OL), Office of Social Communication (OSC), Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), later renamed as Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), Bishops' Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA), Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA), Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA).

5 FABC IV, 'The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia,' *FAPA Vol. 1*, 177-98.

6 Louis Bouyer remarks that 'to rediscover the true significance, the true role of the laity, it must be studied in the concrete life of the Church, where the laity are articulated with the apostolic ministry.' See *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982) 408.

7 FABC III, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 49-65.

8 APMC, arts. 13, 14ii, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 69-70.

9 FABC III, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

10 Ibid., art. 7.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56.

11 TAC, 'Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,' art. 5.2.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 294.

12 OTC, 'The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,' art. 4.2, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 305.

13 FABC III, art. 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60.

14 BIRA IV/3, arts. 10-11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 260.

15 FABC III, arts. 7.2, 15, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 56, 60; BIRA IV/3, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 260.

16 Ibid., art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 55.

17 OSC, 'Communication Challenges in Asia,' *FAPA Vol. 2*, 185-6; OSC, 'Church and Public Relations,' *FAPA Vol. 3*, 185.

18 OE, 'Consultation on Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad Gentes*: A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia,' art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 222.

19 For a detailed discussion of the contextual orientation of the FABC's theology see Peter N.V. Hai, 'Fides Quaerens Dialogum: Theological Methodologies of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences,' *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 8 (2006), http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/378665/AEJT_8.9_Hai_Fides_Quaerens_Dialogum.pdf (accessed 24 January 2012); translated into Vietnamese by Nguyen Hoang Vinh as 'Fides Quaerens Dialogum: Cac Phuong Phap Than Hoc Cua Lien Hiep Cac Hoi Dong Giam Muc A Chau,' in *Thoi Su Than Hoc* [Contemporary Theological Issues] 55 (January 2012) 110-149.

20 For the FABC, the statement that 'the context determines the Church's mission,' is an important principle of the new way of being Church. See OESC, 'A Renewed Catechesis for Asia: Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond,' *FAPA Vol. 2*, 31.

21 For further details see Peter N.V. Hai, 'Models of the Asian Church,' *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 18:1 (April 2011) 61-73, http://aejt.com.au/2011/volume_18/issue_1/?article=325557 (accessed 30 April 2011); translated into Vietnamese by Nguyen Hoang Vinh as 'Cac Mo Hinh Giao Hoi A Chau,' in *Thoi Su Than Hoc* [Contemporary Theological Issues] 54 (November 2011) 159-186.

22 OE, 'Consultation on Evangelization and Communication,' art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 210; OE, 'Consultation on Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad Gentes*: A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia,' arts. 8-9, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 222; OE, 'Consultation on 'Evangelization and Inculturation',' *FAPA Vol. 3*, 216-7.

23 BIRA IV/12, art. 48, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 332; OEIA, 'Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia,' art. 4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 166; OESC, 'Dialogue between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human and Social Development,' art. 25, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 25; BIMA I, art. 11, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 94; BISA I, art. 2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 199; BISA V, arts. 6, 12-14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 218-9; BISA VI, arts. 3, 8-9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 223, 225; BISA VII, arts. 20-21, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 233; FABC V, arts. 2.3.3-2.3.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 278; FABC VI, arts. 3, 14.2, 15, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2, 8, 10; FABC VII, arts. I.A.8, III, *FAPA Vol.3*, 4, 8.

24 OHD, 'Walking Humbly, Acting Justly, Lov-

ing Tenderly in Asia,' art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 44; OL, 'Second Southeast Asian Regional Laity Meeting,' art. 8, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 90; OTC, 'The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,' art. 2.3.10, *FAPA Vol.3*, 277.

25 FABC VI, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 1-12.

26 TAC, 'Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,' art. 51, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 226.

27 FABC VI, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8; TAC, 'Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,' art. 3.3.3.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 274.

28 BIRA IV/1, art. 13, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 249.

29 TAC, 'Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,' arts. 1-4, 5.2, 5.2.4, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 233-255, 255-286, 291-5.

30 Ibid., arts. 5.2.5-5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 294-5. It is of note that the heading of section 3.3.3.1 is 'The Church as Communion: Sacrament of Harmony.' Ibid., 273.

31 Ibid., art. 5.2.6, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 295.

32 FABC I, arts. 8, 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 13, 16; FABC III, art. 17.3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60; FABC V, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279-81; FABC VII, art. III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8; BIMA IV, art. 7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

33 FABC IV, art. 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193; FABC V, arts. 1.7, 2.3.9, 4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 275, 279, 282; BIRA IV/2, arts. 8.1-8.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 252; BILA III, art. 12.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 245.

34 FABC III, art. 17.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60; FABC V, art. 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279-81; FABC VII, art. III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8; BILA III, art. 13.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 245.

35 FABC I, arts. 12-24, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 14-6; FABC III, art. 17.1, 17.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 60-1; FABC V, arts. 4.1-4.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282; FABC VI, arts. 3, 15, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 2, 10; FABC VII, art. I.A.8, III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 4, 8. We coined the term 'a triple dialogue of life' to better reflect the FABC's view of the triple dialogue and its emphasis on the dialogue of life. These two concepts were often used in the same train of thought in their statements; see BIMA I, arts. 5, 9-12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 94-5; BISA VI, art. 10, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 225.

36 FABC I, arts. 21-23, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 15-16; FABC V, art. 2.3.9, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 279; FABC VI, art. 14.2, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 8; FABC VII, art. III, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 8.

37 FABC IV, art. 2.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 179.

38 For a detailed treatment of this subject see Peter N.V. Hai, 'Features of the FABC's Theology of the Laity,' *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 47:1 (2010)

7-37, <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/content/features-fabc%E2%80%99s-theology-laity> (accessed 24 January 2012); Peter N.V. Hai, 'Evaluation of the FABC's Theology of the Laity,' *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 47:3 (2010) 234-262, <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/content/evaluation-fabcs-theology-laity> (accessed 24 January 2012). See also Peter N.V. Hai, 'Lay People in the Asian Church: A Study of John Paul II's Theology of the Laity in *Ecclesia in Asia* with Reference to the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences,' *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 10 (2007), http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/378076/AEJT_10.4_Hai_Lay_People.pdf (accessed 24 January 2012); Peter N.V. Hai, 'Sentire cum ecclesia: Laity and Holiness in Papal and Local Theologies,' [scheduled for publication in] *The Australasian Catholic Record* (January-March 2012).

39 APMC, arts. 26-8, 25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 70-2.

40 BIMA III, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104; BIMA IV, art. 6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

41 BIMA IV, art. 5, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292.

42 OEIA and OE, 'Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia,' art. 12, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 171; FABC IV, art. 4.6.2, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193-4; BILA V, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 79; BILA I, art. 2-3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 235-6; BILA II, art. 14, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 239, 242.

43 BILA III, arts. 1-2, 6-7, 13.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 243-

5; FABC IV, arts. 4.7.1, 4.3.1, 4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 194, 192-3.

44 In November 1970, 180 Catholic bishops of Asia met for the first time around Paul VI to discuss the topic of *Populorum Progressio* in Asia, an event that led to the creation of the FABC. See FABC, 'Asian Bishops' Meeting,' arts. 1, 3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 3. Two years later, on 16th November 1972, the Holy See approved the statutes of the FABC *ad experimentum* for two years, marking the official establishment of the Federation. See FABC, *Statutes of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (Hong Kong: General Secretariat of the FABC, 1995) 1.

45 Our observation is inspired by the three criteria highlighted by Gerard Vincent Hall in his work, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1994).

46 OTC, 'Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,' art. 4.2.4.5, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 375-6.

47 In his address to the new cardinals on 20th February 1946, Pius XII affirmed that '... i fedeli, e più precisamente i laici, si trovano nella linea più avanzata della vita della Chiesa; per loro la Chiesa è il principio vitale della società umana. Perciò essi, specialmente essi, debbono avere una sempre più chiara consapevolezza, non soltanto di appartenere alla Chiesa, ma di essere la Chiesa, vale a dire la comunità dei fedeli ... Essi sono la Chiesa.' *Acta PII PP. XII: Allocutiones I, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 38 (1946) 149.

Trusting in the Lord, who will not fail those whom he has called, the church in Asia joyfully makes her pilgrim way into the third millennium. Her only joy is that which comes from sharing with the multitude of Asia's peoples the immense gift which she herself received – the love of Jesus the Savior. Her one ambition is to continue his mission of service and love, so that all Asians 'may have life and have it abundantly' (Jn. 10:10). (John-Paul II, Ecclesia in Asia, no. 50)

The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia. Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith. (Idem, no. 10)