

AN “ASIAN” DIALOGUE DECALOGUE

Principles of Interreligious Dialogue from Asia’s Bishops

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During the Theological Forum on “Theological Views on Religions and Cultures” held last July 21-23, 2011 at the Loyola School of Theology, Fr. James Kroeger, M.M., Professor of Systematic Theology and Missiology at LST, delivered a paper entitled, “An ‘Asian’ Dialogue Decalogue. Principles of Interreligious Dialogue from Asia’s Bishops”. Fr. Jim’s paper is presented here in full.

<http://www.lst.edu/academics/landas-archives/353-an-qasianq-dialogue-decalogue-j-kroeger-mm>

The most influential body in the Asian Church since the Second Vatican Council is undoubtedly the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC). It has strengthened the bonds of communication among the bishops in the region and has contributed to Church renewal and the development of a shared vision about the Church and her evangelizing mission in Asia. Thus, one can validly assert that the FABC is truly “Asia’s Continuing Vatican II.”

The FABC is a transnational episcopal structure that brings together bishops from twenty-eight Asian countries; it grew out of the historic Asian Bishops’ Meeting (ABM), when 180 bishops met with Pope Paul VI during his 1970 Asian visit. The bishops committed themselves to build “bonds of brotherhood and love,” to foster “a true family of nations in this part of the earth,” and to participate in building “a true community of peoples” in Asia. [Source: ABM (Manila): 27, 12].

Background. Aside from a modest central structure, there are nine FABC offices, which carry out many concrete initiatives and projects. The offices, purposely scattered among various Asian nations, are focused on evangelization, social communication, laity and family, human development, education and student chaplaincy, ecumenical and interreligious affairs, theological concerns, clergy, and consecrated life. Through their diverse activities, each of these offices promotes the growth of the Asian local Churches.

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

For the Church in Asia to truly discover its own identity it must continually engage in a “three-fold dialogue” with the peoples (especially the poor), the cultures, and the religions of Asia [the focused subject of this presentation]. This programmatic vision of a “triple dialogue” has guided the FABC for over three decades. One can assert that as the FABC

pursues its vision and practice of dialogue, it forges bonds of unity and builds community in the Asian context.

Methodology. This present study, focused on the broad area of religions and dialogue in Asia, is presented from the experience and perspective of Asia's bishops (FABC). The presentation will unfold in a systematic manner. First, a clear dialogue principle (expressed in the form of a command or guideline) will be stated. There will be ten of these imperatives; thus, one arrives at a "Dialogue Decalogue." Second, a longer section will present the theological-missiological-pastoral foundations upon which this principle is based. In this section one will find extensively quoted FABC material; this is purposely done so that the original insights of the FABC will be retained. This author finds that the FABC texts themselves are very insightful and eloquent; they are poetic; they are visionary, inspiring, and soul-stirring.

Readers will find the quoted FABC material followed by a specific reference. The original FABC source will be identified by using abbreviations and numerical references; an example is the following: [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 8]. This reference enables a reader to find the original quote, regardless of the printed version or possible translation of the text.

Readers may wish to consult the four-volume collection of FABC documents, *For All the Peoples of Asia [FAPA]*; this series, published by Claretian Publications in Manila, is a standard reference tool for FABC sources. The FABC central secretariat publishes the *FABC Papers*; they are available on the FABC website; see numbers 100 and 125 for comprehensive indexes. Another two-volume resource, which presents all the FABC doctoral studies written from 1985-2008, can serve as a useful source-book; also published by the Claretians in Manila, it bears the title *Theology from the Heart of Asia*. As a conclusion to this paper, a brief, selected bibliography will be included. This presentation now turns to an enunciation of ten dialogue principles derived from the experience and reflection of the Church in Asia.

ONE: TO FACILITATE INTERFAITH DIALOGUE, KNOW WELL THE CONTEXT OF ASIA, ESPECIALLY RELIGIOUS REALITIES.

Foundations. Concrete facts and statistics are most helpful in grasping the enormous diversity and challenges facing the Church in Asia. Current Asian statistics may surprise and startle us; they should shake our complacency. In a word, they concretize the task at hand: bringing the light and power of the Gospel into the multi-religious and pluri-cultural reality of contemporary Asia.

Asia, the world's largest and most populated continent, constitutes one third of the land area of the whole world (17,124,000 square miles) and is home to almost 60% of humanity. It is a continent of the young (about 40% are below 15 years of age); there are more than 30 mega-cities in Asia with populations ranging from 5 to 20 million. The nine most populous nations (in descending order) are: China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan, Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand. China's population exceeds one billion; India's populace crossed the one billion mark in the year 2000. With this massive bulk goes a wide variety of diversity and contrasts—physical, ethnic, social, economic, cultural, political, and religious.

Asia is a continent rich in non-Christian cultures. It is the homeland of three eminent world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam; 85% of all the world's non-Christians are in Asia and they adhere to several of the great religions. Hinduism, born about 5,000 years ago, has about 650 million followers, most of them in India and neighboring countries. Buddhism is a religion and philosophy developed from Hinduism by Siddhartha Gautama, (the "Enlightened One"); it has 300 million followers, mostly in Asia.

Islam, established by the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, is a monotheistic religion; it incorporates elements of Judaic and Christian belief. Islam numbers some 700 million followers in Asia alone; the Catholics of Asia are slightly over 115 million. Significantly, well over 50% of Asian Catholics are found in one country alone—the Philippines; thus, Catholics in most Asian nations are a small—even tiny—minority (frequently less than 1%). The four largest Islamic nations in the world, each with over 100 million Muslims, are found in Asia: Indonesia (216m), Pakistan (161m), India (147m), and Bangladesh (122m) [2007 statistics]. Other significant religious and philosophical-ethical systems in Asia are Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, as well as many indigenous, traditional belief systems.

Catholics worldwide constitute 17.3% of all people; all Christians are 33.1% of humanity [2010 statistics]. Catholics in Asia (approximately 115+ million) represent only 2.9% of the nearly 3.5 billion Asians. The Church in Asia continues to grow. In 1988 there were 84.3 million Catholics; now they have reached 115+ million (an increase of about 25%). The number of priests rose from 27,700 to 32,291 during the same period. Asian countries with the most seminarians (given in descending order) are: India, Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam. The vast majority (86%) of religious sisters are also Asian; countries with the largest number of indigenous sisters (in descending rank) are: India, Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The Church in Asia is known publicly for its commitment to education, health care, and social services.

Regarding the individual nations in the region covered by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), abundant statistics are available; only two items are presented here [2007 statistics]. For each FABC country the estimated population in millions is listed; this is followed by the percentage of Catholics in that nation: Bangladesh (158.6m / 0.27%); Bhutan (0.6m / 0.02%); Burma/Myanmar (48.8m / 1.3%); Cambodia (14.4m / 0.02%); China (1,322.5m / 0.5%); East Timor (1.1m / 97%); Hong Kong (7.2m / 4.7%); India (1,131m / 1.72%); Indonesia (231.6m / 2.58%); Japan (127.7m / 0.36%); Korea-North (23.7m / ?); Korea-South (48.5m / 6.7%); Laos (5.8m / 0.9%); Macau (0.48m / 5%); Malaysia (27.5m / 3%); Mongolia (2.6m / ?); Nepal (28m / 0.05%); Pakistan (162m / 0.6%); Philippines (88.7m / 81%); Singapore (4.4m / 6.5%); Sri Lanka (19.2m / 8%); Taiwan (22.9m / 1.4%); Thailand (62.8m / 0.4%); Vietnam (87.3m / 6.1%).

These few secular and religious statistics already indicate that "being a missionary Church in Asia" demands creative, innovative, dialogical and inculturated approaches to Gospel proclamation. Local Churches must consider diverse cultural, religious, political, social and economic realities as they envision a pastoral program of integral and dialogical evangelization; they must ask themselves how they can serve to build relationships that will manifest God's love for all peoples. The task before the Churches is great; they must respond with enthusiasm and insight!

TWO: APPRECIATE THE FABC VISION OF INTEGRAL, HOLISTIC EVANGELIZATION.

Foundations. This task of evangelization is holistic and comprehensive in its scope; Pope Paul VI noted: “For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.” [Source: Paul VI, *Evangeliu Nuntiandi* 18]. FABC describes missionary evangelization: “Mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with people, as was Jesus: ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (Jn. 1:14).” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 3.1.2]. “Evangelization is the carrying out of the Church’s duty of proclaiming by word and witness the Gospel of the Lord.” [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 25].

The content of evangelization is noted: “... mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God’s Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (FABC I).” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 3.1.2].

“Local Churches, servant and inculturated, are the subject of the evangelizing mission.... The principal elements [are] as follows: 1) simple presence and living witness; 2) concrete commitment to the service of humankind; ... 3) liturgical life ... prayer and contemplation; 4) dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions; ... 5) proclamation and catechesis.... The totality of Christian mission embraces all these elements.” [Source: CTC (Hua Hin, 1991): 36]. “Integral Evangelization requires that we become witnesses in our lives to the values and norms of the Gospel based on our baptismal consecration.” [Source: SFMWA (Hong Kong): 28].

The FABC has also spoken about the motivation for missionary evangelization: “Renewal of a sense of mission will also require a renewal of our motivations for mission. There has been perceived in some way a weakening of these motivations so necessary to persevere in this demanding task. Why indeed, should we evangelize? ... a) We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of gratitude to God.... b) But, mission is also a mandate.... c) We evangelize also because we believe in the Lord Jesus.... d) We evangelize also because we have been incorporated by baptism into the Church, which is missionary by its very nature.... e) And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society.” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 3.2].

THREE: ACKNOWLEDGE THAT INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IS A KEY DIMENSION OF HOLISTIC, INTEGRAL EVANGELIZATION.

Foundations. Asia’s bishops have a deep appreciation of the role of dialogue in the evangelization process; they hold: “Interreligious dialogue is another integral part of evangelization which in the situation of our Churches needs to become a primary concern. We live in the midst of millions of people belonging to the great religious traditions.... In this context we believe that interreligious dialogue is a true expression of the Church’s evangelizing action in which the mystery of Jesus Christ is operative, calling us all to conversion.... We would wish to see interreligious dialogue become a reality at the grassroots level of our Church, through greater openness and reaching out of all their members towards their brothers and sisters of other religious traditions.” [Source: BIMA II (Trivandrum): 14].

“The Church, the sacrament of God’s message in the world, continues Christ’s work of dialogue.... The Church is particularly concerned with man’s religious experience, the motivating and leavening agent in his culture. This means that the Church must constantly be involved in dialogue with men of other religions (cf. *Nostra Aetate* 2). The Christian finds himself continually evangelizing and being evangelized by his partners in dialogue (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 13).” [Source: BIRA II (Kuala Lumpur): 11]. Therefore, “It suffices for the present to indicate here the continued building up of the local church as the focus of the task of evangelization today, with dialogue as its essential mode, ... through interreligious dialogue undertaken in all seriousness.” [Source: IMC (Manila): 19].

Indeed, since the Church in Asia is a “small flock,” the FABC insightfully asserts: “Mission may find its greatest urgency in Asia: it also finds in our continent a distinctive mode: [dialogue].” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 4.1]. “From our experience of dialogue emerged the conviction that dialogue was the key we sought—not dialogue in the superficial sense in which it is often understood, but as a witnessing to Christ in word and deed, by reaching out to people in the concrete reality of their daily lives....” [Source: BIMA I (Baguio): 5]. The FABC frequently employs the categories of dialogue and harmony. This focus on mutual relationships is a central dimension of all bonds of solidarity, no matter what language may express it. Thus, FABC asserts that dialogue is key for them in becoming an Asian Church.

The FABC bishops affirm: “In the context of dialogue we tried to penetrate the meaning of the uniqueness of Christ—in our own inner experience, in our contact with others; ... we realized that there is still much to be discovered, and much that is already discovered but not sufficiently integrated in our lives and in our missionary effort.... We feel that the Christian experience in contact with the age-old religious experience of Asia has much to contribute to the growth and the transformation in outlook and appearance of the Universal Church.” [Source: BIMA I (Baguio): 12].

FABC adds an important point of clarification: “Dialogue does not call for giving up one’s commitment, bracketing it or entering into easy compromise. On the contrary, for a deeper and fruitful dialogue, it is even necessary that each partner be firmly committed to his or her faith.” [Source: BIRA IV/7 (Tagaytay): 10]. “Dialogue within the Church is important and it is this attitude that will lead us to respect others and to understand evangelization as a process of listening to what they are expressing in and through their lives of the goodness of the Almighty God. It is clear that Dialogue is not for Conversion.” [Source: FIESA IV (Kuala Lumpur): 12].

FOUR: DISCOVER GOD’S SAVING DESIGN THAT IS AT WORK IN THE ASIAN REALITY.

Foundations. FABC documents are premised on a broad vision of God’s loving plan of salvation, a design expressed in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In addition, “Christians believe that God’s saving will is at work, in many different ways, in all religions. It has been recognized since the time of the apostolic Church, and stated clearly again by the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 22; *Lumen Gentium* 16), that the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church (cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 6). God’s saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person.... His ways are mysterious and unfathomable, and no one can dictate the direction of His grace.” [Source: BIRA II (Kuala Lumpur): 12].

“God, the Father of all, has called all men to share in his life and love through his son Jesus Christ. The risen Christ and his Spirit are active in the world making this love a present and growing reality, making all things new. This same love urges us on to dialogue with people of other religions, because we have, especially since the Second Vatican Council, an increasing awareness of the positive role of other religions in God’s plan of salvation.” [Source: BIRA III (Madras): 2].

FABC continues: “In Asia especially this involves a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples. In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation.” [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 14]. And again: “... a clearer perception of the Church’s mission in the context of the Asian reality helps us discover even deeper motivations. Members of other religious traditions already in some way share with us in the mystery of salvation.” [Source: CTC (Hua Hin): 50]. Furthermore: “We are glad that Vatican II affirmed the presence of salvific values in other religions. We are grateful for the timely insights.... The Gospel fulfills all hopes, a Gospel which Asia and the whole world direly need.” [Source: BIMA I (Suwon): 7].

On this theme Pope John Paul II has written: “The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals, but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.... The Church’s relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: ‘Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man’.” [Source: Redemptoris Missio: 28-29]. Within the awareness of the Holy Spirit’s action and their commitment to dialogue, Asia’s bishops boldly state: “... we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence.” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 4.3].

FIVE: UNDERSTAND THE ASIAN CHURCH’S COMMITMENT TO MISSIONARY EVANGELIZATION, INCLUDING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PERSON AND PROMISES OF CHRIST.

Foundations. The Catholic Church in Asia is committed to bring the Good News to Asia and to gather its peoples into a family united by bonds of mutual respect. However, local Christians are not always fully involved in this mission. The FABC documents assert that: “... the preaching of Jesus Christ and His Gospel to our peoples in Asia becomes a task which today assumes an urgency, a necessity and magnitude unmatched in the history of our Faith in this part of the world. It is because of this that we can repeat the Apostle’s word, and repeat it joyfully, ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel,’ (I Cor. 9:16) for it is ‘the love of Christ which presses us’ (II Cor. 5:14) 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).” [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 8].

Asian Christians believe that: “... it is as servants of the Lord and of humanity that we Christians share the same journey with all the Asian peoples. The Church was not sent to observe but to serve—to serve the Asian peoples in their quest for God and for a better human life; to serve Asia under the leading of the Spirit of Christ and in the manner of Christ himself who did not come to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for all (Mk. 10:45)—and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered

together in harmony as his family. As servant of Yahweh and of humanity, the Church will seek above all faithfulness to God and to the Asian peoples, and will also invite to full participation in the Christian community those who are lead to it by the Spirit of God.” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 6:3].

The Church in Asia admits its limitations: “... how insufficient for the most part has been our missionary consciousness and responsibility. We have so frequently forgotten that the summons and challenge to make known the person and message of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him is a mandate addressed to even the youngest Christian community.” [Source: FABC III (Bangkok): 9:9]. “Unfortunately for many Catholics, faith is only something to be received and celebrated. They do not feel it is something to be shared. The missionary nature of the gift of faith must be inculcated in all Christians.” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 3.2.3].

The Churches of Asia see a clear Christological component to evangelization; they assert: “While we are aware and sensitive to the fact that evangelization is a complex reality and has many essential aspects—such as witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of the Kingdom, struggling along with those who strive for justice and peace, dialogue, sharing, inculturation, mutual enrichment with other Christians and the followers of all religions—we affirm that there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity.” [Source: BIMA I (Suwon): 5-6].

“It is true that in many places Christ cannot yet be proclaimed openly by words. But He can, and should be, proclaimed through other ways, namely: through the witness of the life of the Christian community and family, and their striving to know and live more fully the faith they profess; through their desire to live in peace and harmony with those who do not share our faith.... Our proclamation of Jesus must also be urgently directed towards the workers, the poor and needy, and the oppressed....” [Source: BIMA III (Changhua): 10-11].

FABC continues: “... challenged by the stark reality of millions on our continent who have not yet been evangelized, we welcome ... this opportunity to face with a sense of urgency the task of making Christ known, loved and followed by the vast multitude of our brothers and sisters.” [Source: BIMA I (Baguio): 2]. “More than two billions of Asians have perhaps never encountered the Person of Jesus in a knowing and conscious way; more than two billions of Asians have never really heard His message. While this fact fills us with sorrow, it also spurs us on to longing and hope, because we know He will accompany the ways of all those whose footsteps are lovely because they bring the good news of His mercy and love.” [Source: BIMA III (Changhua): 4].

“We affirm ... that ‘the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization.’ ... But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christ-like deeds. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds—this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.” [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 4.1]. “The local Churches of Asia will proclaim Jesus Christ to their fellow humans in a dialogical manner.” [Source: CTC (Hua Hin): 51]. Indeed, Asian Christians are committed to “telling

the Jesus story”; one key source of their motivation is their own relationship with the person of Christ.

SIX: ADOPT POSITIVE ATTITUDES THAT FOSTER DIALOGUE IN PRACTICE.

Foundations. The commitment of Asia’s bishops to interfaith dialogue is clear and consistent; the FABC enunciates foundational attitudes essential to this dialogue. “In Asia, the emphasis in interreligious dialogue falls not so much on academic or theological discussions, as on the sharing of life at all levels. Christians carry out the mission entrusted to them by Jesus Christ when they participate fully in the social and cultural life of the societies in which they live, enriching others by the values they have learned from the Gospel, and finding themselves enriched by the spiritual treasures of their neighbors of other faiths. Thus, the ‘dialogue of life’ is central to Christian life in Asia.... Christians in Asia are called to live their faith deeply, in openness and respect for the religious commitment of others.” [Source: FIRA IV (Pattaya): 4].

Dialogue demands transformed attitudes: “... to be able to engage in genuine interreligious dialogue, we need to deepen our self-knowledge and continuously discover our personal identity.... we need to be continually healed of negativities like suspicion and fear.... in order to go deeper into ourselves in this inward journey to the God of the Ongoing Dialogue, we need to integrate Asian forms of prayer.... We acknowledge here the tremendous opportunities we have of learning from the other religious traditions of Asia, especially from the mystical traditions.” [Source: FIRA I (Ipoh): 3.2-3.3].

“Any dialogical enterprise requires certain basic attitudes, as exemplified in Christ: — a spirit of humility, openness, receptivity, and ... for what God wishes to tell us through them [Asia’s religions]; — a witnessing to the saving grace of Christ, not so much by the proclaimed word but through love in the Christian community, so that its universal validity is seen and felt as such; — a placing of priority on fellowship..., so that we are led spontaneously and naturally to deeper religious dialogue.” [Source: BIRA I (Bangkok): 18].

FABC promotes a balanced appreciation of dialogue: “... for a deeper and fruitful dialogue, it is even necessary that each partner be firmly committed to his or her faith.... While firmly adhering to our commitment to Christ, it is indispensable for dialogue that we enter into the religious universe of our dialogue partner and see his or her sincere and unflinching faith-commitment. More than that, we should appreciate the commitment of the other.... That is why listening attentively with our heart to the personal commitment of faith and witness of the other partner can not only facilitate dialogue, but also enrich us and make us grow in our faith, and help us to reinterpret it.” [Source: BIRA IV/7 (Tagaytay): 10-11].

“Dialogue is a crucial challenge to the Churches in Asia in their growing commitment to the building of the kingdom. This challenge is fraught with risks.... However, with the confidence that the Spirit is with us and helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26), we commit ourselves to this task of dialogue....” [Source: BIRA III (Madras): Conclusion]. In short, dialogue among the followers of diverse religions is to be lived in the daily vicissitudes of life.

SEVEN: APPRECIATE THE SPECIFIC FABC-FOSTERED ATTITUDES TOWARD ASIA'S VENERABLE RELIGIONS.

Foundations. The FABC in its first plenary gathering enunciated a profound—even poetic—appraisal of Asia's religions: "In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations." [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 14]. "How then can we not give them reverence and honor? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?" [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 15].

"Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word of God (Ad Gentes 9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our peoples' deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived. Thus it can become a sharing in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood among His sons." [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 16]. One notes that these words describe the growing intimacy in a spiritual relationship.

The FABC observes that "this dialogue will teach us what our faith in Christ leads us to receive from these religious traditions, and what must be purified in them, healed and made whole, in the light of God's Word." [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 17]. Asia's bishops continue: "On our part we can offer what we believe the Church alone has the duty and joy to offer to them and to all men: oneness with the Father in Jesus His Son; the ways to grace Christ gives us in His Gospel and His sacraments, and in the fellowship of the community which seeks to live in Him; an understanding too of the value of the human person and of the social dimensions of human salvation—a salvation which assumes and gives meaning to human freedom, earthly realities, and the course of this world's history." [Source: FABC I (Taipei): 18].

EIGHT: DEVELOP A GENUINE "SPIRITUALITY OF DIALOGUE."

Foundations. For over three decades the FABC has asserted that spirituality is linked to authentic dialogue: "In Asia, home to great religions, where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual, even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation." [Source: FABC VII (Samphan): C-2].

"At the center of this new way of being Church [in Asia] is the action of the Spirit of Jesus, guiding and directing individual believers as well as the whole community to live a life that is Spirit-filled—that is, to live an authentic spirituality. It is nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia." [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 9:1].

"To risk being wounded in the act of loving, to seek to understand in a climate of misunderstanding—these are no light burdens to bear. Dialogue demands a deep

spirituality which enables man, as did Jesus Christ, to hang on to his faith in God's love, even when everything seems to fall apart. Dialogue, finally, demands a total Christ-like self-emptying so that, led by the Spirit, we may be more effective instruments in building up God's Kingdom." [Source: BIRA IV/7 (Tagaytay): 16].

"In Asia, the dialogue of prayer and spirituality is highly valued. Prayer together, in ways congruent with the faith of those who take part, is an occasion for Christians and followers of other faiths to appreciate better the spiritual riches which each group possesses, as well as to grow in respect for one another as fellow pilgrims on the path through life. Human solidarity is deepened when people approach the divine as one human family." [Source: FIRA IV (Pattaya): 8]. At the First Asian Mission Congress in 2006, the participants committed themselves to "living and promoting a spirituality of the dialogue of life with the peoples of Asia." [Source: AMC I (Chiang Mai): Orientations, Part One].

The Asian bishops have a "friend of dialogue" in the person of John Paul II (see *Redemptoris Missio* [RM] 55-57); elsewhere in the same document the pope has written: "... the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that 'every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart'." [Source: RM 29].

Asia's bishops face the challenge of dialogue with realism: "Interreligious dialogue is never easy, it calls for its own spirituality. It is our resolve, therefore, to live and witness to this spirituality of dialogue...." [Source: FIRA I (Ipoh): 4.2]. "[C]redible evangelization demands from us Christians in Asia a life of authentic contemplation and genuine compassion.... Only an ego-emptying, and consequently powerless, Christian community has the credibility to proclaim the folly of the message of the cross. Such a process of evangelization fosters a culture of dialogue in Asia." [Source: FEISA I (Pattaya): 7.4.1-2]. Finally, "The call of the laity to holiness and consequently, to the apostolate of the Church..., is a demand of their Christian identity in virtue of the Christian's full incorporation into Christ and in the Holy Eucharist." [Source: BILA III (Singapore): 6].

NINE: BELIEVE THAT DIALOGUE SERVES THE GROWTH OF A NEW HUMANITY AND THE KINGDOM.

Foundations. FABC asserts that dialogue is always oriented outward in service of people and God's kingdom. The involvement of the Church in dialogue can be seen as a blessing for all the peoples of Asia. "We build the Church in order to build the Kingdom in our Asian societies and cultures.... Our mission therefore must be a dialogue with those of other religious ways that will require us both to proclaim and be proclaimed to, to speak and to listen, to teach and to learn. Through such a dialogical mission, God's Reign will grow in Asia and the Church will become more truly an Asian Church, inculturated in Asian realities." [Source: FIRA II (Pattaya): 3.5].

"The Kingdom of God is therefore universally present and at work. Wherever men and women open themselves to the transcendent divine mystery which impinges upon them and go out of themselves in love and service to fellow humans, there the reign of God is at work.... This goes to show that the Reign of God is a universal reality, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It is the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, in which Christians and others share together. It is the fundamental 'mystery of unity' which unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart." [Source:

CTC (Hua Hin): 29-30].

With clear resolve, Asia's bishops state: "Therefore, we commit ourselves: ... To take every opportunity to make Jesus Christ and his message known in a way that is acceptable to Asians, presenting him to them with an 'Asian face,' using Asian cultural concepts, terms and symbols; ... To present the Gospel message as humble servants of the Kingdom of God, always sensitive to the religious and cultural traditions of the people where the Spirit leads us to make Jesus known." [Source: AMSAL I (Tagaytay): 2].

"This common spiritual pilgrimage demands that we take inspiration from the praxis of Jesus, especially his table fellowship with publicans and sinners, wherein we discover the primal form of the Church of Christ. Before Christianity got established as a structured religion, it was a spiritual movement: Jesus' journey with the poor towards the Kingdom of God. In close dialogue with the poor and the religious cultures of Asia, the Church would be able to rediscover its pristine dynamism which demands a radical emptying (kenosis) in its thought patterns, ritual forms and community structures. This age of journeying with sisters and brothers of Asian religions is a privileged moment (kairos) for the Church to return to its original call." [Source: FEISA I (Pattaya): 7.5.1].

TEN: CONCRETIZE A CLEAR COMMITMENT TO DIALOGUE BY ESTABLISHING MINISTRIES AND SERVICES WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH THAT FOCUS ON THIS PRIORITY.

Foundations. To promote and concretize this dialogical vision, the FABC links its implementation with Asia's local Churches and their ministries. "Each local Church is determined by her human context and lives in a dialectical relationship with the human society into which she is inserted as the Gospel leaven. Since each local Church should embody into the context the task entrusted to her by the servant Lord, she has to discover time and again what ministries and what ministerial structures she requires in order to fulfill her mission to offer to a human society the salvation brought about by Jesus Christ...." [Source: APMC (Hong Kong): 25].

"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 ... 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." [Source: FABC V (Bandung): 3.3.1].

The FABC forcefully asserts: "Asian Churches then must become truly Asian in all things. The principle of indigenization and inculturation is at the very root of their coming into their own. The ministry of Asian Churches, if it is to be authentic, must be relevant to Asian societies. This calls on the part of the Churches for originality, creativity and inventiveness, for boldness and courage." [Source: APMC (Hong Kong): 26].

"Now—as Vatican II already affirmed with all clarity and force—every local church is and cannot be but missionary. Every local church is 'sent' by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieu, and to bear it also into all the world. For every local church this is a primary task.... Every local church is responsible for its

mission....” [Source: IMC (Manila): 14].

With great conviction, Asia’s bishops state: “... the decisive new phenomenon for Christianity in Asia will be the emergence of genuine Christian communities in Asia—Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others. The consequences will be tremendous ... [in] all aspects of their life.... If the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future.” [Source: APMC (Hong Kong): 14].

“Each local church has its own vocation in the one history of salvation, in the one Church of Christ. In each local church each people’s history, each people’s culture, meanings and values, each people’s traditions are taken up, not diminished or destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified if need be, and fulfilled ... in the life of the Spirit.” [Source: IMC (Manila): 15].

CONCLUSION

Ecclesia in Asia (EA), the document that emerged from the 1998 Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops (Asian Synod), explored many pathways in the task of integral evangelization. Particularly in the area of interfaith dialogue, EA noted several pivotal insights harmoniously consistent with the FABC vision: “Contact, dialogue and cooperation with the followers of other religions is a task which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the whole Church as a duty and a challenge.... From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission ad gentes.” [EA 31].

“It is therefore important for the Church in Asia to provide suitable models of interreligious dialogue—evangelization in dialogue and dialogue in evangelization—and suitable training for those involved.... The followers of Christ must have the gentle and humble heart of their Master, never proud, never condescending, as they meet their partners in dialogue.... Only if the People of God recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ will they be able to communicate that gift to others through proclamation and dialogue.” [EA 31].

In addition to the copious FABC material provided in this presentation of an Asian Dialogue Decalogue, this author desires to close by citing his favorite quote from Pope John Paul II on dialogue. Speaking in Manila to all the peoples of Asia during his 1981 Philippine visit, the pope asserted that the goal of interfaith dialogue should be altruistic (not focused only on personal enrichment); he stated: “Christians will, moreover, join hands with all men and women of good will ... [and] work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served.” Indeed, a key Asian way of mission is dialogical service of the needy. This approach can clearly reveal the face of Jesus in Asia today, strengthen bonds of relationship with Asia’s burgeoning masses, and place the Church firmly on the side of the Asian multitudes.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	- Asian Bishops' Meeting (Manila – 1970)
ACMC	- Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (Hong Kong – 1977)
AMC	- Asian Mission Congress (Chiang Mai – 2006)
AMSAL	- Asian-born Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life
BILA	- Bishops' Institute for Lay Apostolate
BIMA	- Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate
BIRA	- Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
CTC	- Conclusions of Theological Consultation (Hua Hin – 1991)
EA	- Ecclesia in Asia
EN	- Evangelii Nuntiandi
FABC	- Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
FABC I-IX	- FABC Plenary Assembly Statements I-IX
FEISA	- Faith Encounters in Social Action
FIRA	- Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs
IMC	- International Mission Congress (Manila – 1979)
RM	- Redemptoris Missio
SFMWA	- Statement on Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia

NOTE: All abbreviations used in the text refer to FABC documents can be found in the four volumes of *For All the Peoples of Asia*, produced by Claretian Publications in Quezon City (Metro Manila), Philippines (1992, 1997, 2002, 2007).

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