

**REVISITING ASIAN CHURCH
A Critical Analysis of 'FABC at Forty Years:
Responding to the Challenges of Asia - A New
Evangelisation' in the Light of the
Contemporary Developments in Theology**

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Abstract

On the occasion of its fortieth year anniversary, FABC gathered its 10th plenary assembly to evaluate and renew its commitment to the triple dialogue with the poor, cultures and religions. As a fruit of the assembly, they released a document titled *FABC at Forty Years* which summarised the findings and suggestions of the assembly. The document is significant as it gives a broader spectrum of the foundations and charisma of the Asian Church. Moreover, it is inspiring and instructive as it attempts novel analyses of the global issues by summing them into 15 megatrends. However, when we examine the assembly's analyses of these mega trends, we may realise that document is in want of a comprehensive understanding of the issues and normative/concrete recommendations. This article attempts to make an overarching summary of the document critically exposing the document's analyses of global issues and its recommendations in the context of contemporary developments in theology/philosophy.

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In the context of a major response to the papal encyclical on the need for a global awakening towards care for the mother earth and Pope Francis' other inspiring initiatives, we intend to revisit the foundations of Asian Church by going back to a two-year old fortieth year anniversary document of FABC's 10th plenary assembly. The document emerged as a summary, evaluation, and renewed commitment of the Asian Church to proclaiming the Gospel through its triple dialogue with the poor, cultures, and religions. While everyone is eager to discuss future possibilities with the freshness of the Church in the presence of Pope Francis, it is good to examine our foundations and take stock of our strengths and failures before we embark the new trajectories offered in Pope Francis. We do this in three parts: first by presenting an overarching summary of the FABC document; second a critical examination of the document's analysis of the 'Asian situation'; and, third a re-appropriation of its operative theologies and their relevance to our era.

1. Understanding the Document

Asian bishops and theologians have fostered what may be called a regnocentric or kingdom-of-God-centered way of being church. Their emphasis is not on establishing new church organization or on instituting structural reforms, much less elaborating a theoretical ecclesiology. Rather, their main, if not exclusive, concern has been to implement, pastorally and spiritually, ways of being church that are appropriate to the sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and religious contexts of Asia.¹

In the document *FABC at Forty Years*,² the plenary assembly presents an overall summary of her concerns since the inception of FABC in 1972. It aims to reexamine the relevance of her presence and through it an evaluation of the local church in different regions of Asia. The document reads that it purports "to express our deep gratitude for God's blessing [...], to listen to the renewing Spirit [...], [to] discern the pastoral situation that confronts us" (# 3). We can therefore comprehend the document by studying it in three broad categories: origin and development, re-appropriation, and commitment.

¹Peter C. Phan "Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II in Asia," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 315.

²FABC, *FABC at Forty Years: Responding to the Challenges of Asia a New Evangelisation*, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/FABC%20Papers%20138%20final.pdf>. Henceforth it would be referred only by the article numbers.

1.1. Origin and Development: Legacy of FABC

Given the complexity of Asian socio-political, economic, and religio-cultural, situation,³ the Asian Bishops felt the need to come together to 'bear the Asian face of Jesus' (#11). Geographically FABC covers the Episcopal Conferences, Local Churches, Bishops, Clergy, Religious, and Laity from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, from Kazakhstan to Timor Leste. Besides the Churches of the Latin rite, FABC has members who belong to *sui iuris* Eastern rite Churches that trace their origins back to apostle St Thomas (#15).

Ever since its approval in 1972, the conference has regularly gathered to reflect over her mission in Asia and has established itself as an independent organ of thought and action. In her nine plenary assemblies, she has developed her method and content in response to the context. Her triple dialogue method (1974) — dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the cultures and dialogue with the religions (# 5) — has become an important contribution to the Universal church.⁴ In the subsequent plenary assemblies from 1978 to 2008, it has, in the words of the document, "examined the internal requirements of a Church for credible integral evangelization" (#6). If we put them in a chronological sequence, it has begun with 'prayer' (1978), 'community of faith' (1982), 'evangelizing role of lay people' (1986), 'the renewal in evangelization in view of the third millennium' (1990), 'Christian discipleship' (1995) 'on its mission of love and service' (2000), 'family and culture of integral life' (2004), 'Holy Eucharist (2008)" (#5-9).

Characterized by its dialogical approach towards the pluralism of cultures, traditions, and economic situation of the people, the Catholic Church in Asia takes a preferential option for the poor, the youth and the environment. It works for the realization of the kingdom of God as servant leaders and community of disciples. Both laity and clergy empowered by the example of Jesus and drawing their strength and inspiration from the Holy Eucharist become incredible heralds of the Gospel. This is expressed through her mission of love and service bearing witness to a "compassionate, loving, forgiving, self-sacrificing, teacher, servant, healer, prophet, life-giver, ennobler of the poor," Jesus with an Asian sensitivity (#11).

The fruits of such a reflection are also evidenced in her growth as an institution and her initiatives for the realization of her vision. The

³It is instructive to read Peter Phan for a description of the Asian situation: "Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II in Asia," 305-310.

⁴Phan, "Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II in Asia," 316.

document notes some of the achievements of FABC: its 'radio channel' (#10); its contextual method of pastoral action and theologizing; and its success in her efforts to form, the ever-growing, 'Basic Ecclesial Communities or Small Christian Communities' in Asia (#12). It also marks as a milestone the development of FABC offices, like Office of Evangelization, Office of Social Communication, and Office of Theological Concerns⁵ that spearhead the implementation of her orientations for a renewed church in Asia (#13).

1.2. Re-Appropriation of Its Vision in the Face of New Challenges

At the end of the first section, the document makes a quick critical appropriation of the chasm that divides her noble ideas and its realization in the grass roots (#16). With the examination of the socio-political, economical, cultural, and religious situation of the continent, it calls for a renewal and freshness in her mission of new evangelization. The newness of the evangelization in Asia, as per the document, consists in the trajectories of Asian churches adequate to the *new* context — the signs of the times. The document names this new context 'as mega trends' (#17). It makes a list of 15 mega trends and examines its impact on the church communities. We can group them under two broad categories, namely, socio-economic (political) megatrends and religio-cultural megatrends, though a good number would be relevant to both socio-cultural and religio-cultural aspects of our society.⁶

The document identifies in the socio-economic megatrends factors like 'globalization,' 'poverty,' 'migrants and refugees,' 'population,' 'threats to life,' 'ecology,' and 'socio-economic and political problems of women and indigenous people,' as a threat to the integral development of society. It is deeply concerned about the varied challenges that await swift response like the imbalance in economy; unequal growth; exploitation of the poor, indigenous people, and the environment; imbalance of knowledge and power; vulnerability of the migrants and refugees; threatening natural disasters due to ecological crisis; and increasing conflicts, violence, and a culture of death.

In the religio-cultural megatrends, 'culture,' 'religious freedom,' 'social communication,' 'laity,' 'cultural aspects of women,' 'youth,' 'pentecostalism,' and 'vocations,' it finds a threat to the sense of the sacred and gospel values in the world. It denotes the following as its

⁵For a complete list of the offices see footnote no. 22 of *FABC at Forty Years: Responding to the Challenges of Asia a New Evangelisation*.

⁶The division is mine.

major concerns: the problem of secularization, materialism, and postmodernism; the indifference to moral values; increasing violence against minority religious groups; untamed power of social communication and information technologies; cultural stereotypes on women; empowerment of laity; counter-witness of *secular* culture to young people; the loss of Catholics to pentacostals; and the need to foster vocations.

Although, the document realizes that the challenges supersede their contribution, it greatly acknowledges the contribution of the economic development, life trends, social communication, culture, laity, and young people.⁷ It succinctly notes, “the positive mega trends are moments of grace while the negatives are opportunities of grace” (#32). Hence it sees in them a fertile soil for mission to renew Asia towards ‘justice, integrity, unity, reconciliation, peace and harmony, and love.’ This, according to the document, is the task of ‘new evangelization’ (# 33).

1.3. Commitment and Recommendations

Drawing from the wisdom of the scriptures and the life of Jesus Christ, the document presents the fundamental principles that guide its task of new evangelization. First, God is the source and sustainer of all creation; the whole creation in communion and solidarity moves towards its end; human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, tend creation towards its created end (#34-42). Second, the sin of the creation is overcome in the salvation wrought by Jesus. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Jesus event and its implications for the world: human dignity, solidarity, preferential love for the poor, God’s universal love, the harmony of creation, centrality of the human person, justice, integrity and service beyond conventions, and finally his paschal mystery, redemption, and the new creation (#43-49).

The document prides itself that the story of Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of the world forms the very heart of its mission (#50-51). The Asian Church would execute it in a triple dialogue with the poor, cultures, and religions, in the Local Church (#51). Hence to respond credibly and effectively the document recommends the Church to envisage its identity as Church-in-mission and disciples of the Lord (#51). It includes the following dimensions: to play a prophetic role in the society, to evangelize Asia especially parts that has not heard about Jesus, and present the kingdom values, to make the faith and

⁷For a detailed discussion of the mega trends read the second part of the paper.

liturgy as the source of our action, to work in communion within the local church and among local churches, and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide it in accomplishing this mission of God (#52-56).

The recommendations for the local churches are: 1) to draw a concrete plan of action in the local church; 2) to make special effort for faith formation and value education in Education institutions; 3) to have living dialogue with the poor and promote evangelical poverty; 4) to initiate movements that promote a culture of life; 5) to continue to dialogue with other cultures, religions and secular movements; 6) to inculcate a new sense of environmental responsibility and to develop a Theology of Creation; 7) to create a network of pastoral care for migrant workers and itinerant people and their families; 8) to provide an effective spiritual and pastoral care for the integral growth of indigenous people and preservation of their cultures; 9) to develop a prophetically critical and discerning approach to postmodernism, globalization, and secularization; 10) to make avail the FABC documents in local languages for the people (PR #1-12).

2. Critical Analysis of the Challenges and Recommendations in Megatrends

The mega-trends themselves indicate the inadequacies of Church response that reflect in turn mega-trends in the Church. We have progressed but we still have a long journey towards the realization of the vision of being of a new way of being Church. For this we humbly say to the Lord, *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa* (#16).

FABC document is highly avowed for its sensitivity to the socio-economic, political, and cultural liberation of the people. Its analysis of the global scenario, in fifteen megatrends and their explanations, is a good insight. It has acknowledged its positive and negative impacts in society. One can almost state that it has not left behind any other pressing issues of the people of Asia. Problems like poverty, violence, and exploitation of the minority — indigenous people, religious minorities, and migrants and refugees — are dealt really well. The recommendations, however are generic in nature. It is neither concrete nor critically constructed. For instance, in its recommendation against poverty we read, “have a living dialogue with the poor and promote a culture of evangelical poverty” (PR #2). Such a general and non-normative recommendation at the end of the document, that seeks to overcome its limitations in the past forty years, by a renewed methodology, ‘a new ardor, new methods, and new expression’ (#12) is disappointing.

The solutions, presented as ‘recommendations,’ betray a poverty of knowledge about the socio-economic and cultural situation of the continent. A sensible solution would at-least adopt a charity model. This is discerned in the document’s efforts to assist migrants and indigenous people. The larger issues like globalization, ecological crisis, religio-cultural inequality of women, the efforts of nations to overcome the inflating numbers in population, the problem of just and equal development, science and development, and equality in education, would not be affected by this document. I am afraid, after the next forty years, FABC’s 20th plenary assembly would write that it adapts the expression from this document “*mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*” to record its failure to realize its vision.

Here we shall expose the pitfalls, contradictions and inconsistencies that effect ambiguous and ineffective recommendations from the plenary assembly. We do this by presenting the analysis of the megatrend mostly its criticisms, its foundation in scripture (The content of this analysis is taken from the document but the method is mine), and the solution to overcome the issue juxtaposed to one another. A problem in the document’s analysis of the mega-trend is indicated in italics in the respective column asking for a reflective pause about the need to rethink or revise the document’s contribution to the ongoing debate of the issue.⁸

Mega Trends	Analysis	Scriptural foundations for critical outlook	Solutions as Recommendations for the Local Church
Globalization	Neo-liberal capitalism, free-markets, and free trades widen the gap between the rich and poor. It also poses a threat to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal destination of created goods to all men and all peoples (#40). • Jesus’ call for Justice, 	<i>Other than the direct or indirect effects of its recommendation to overcome poverty (PR#8, 9) and to renew importance to faith education and value education</i>

⁸Given the limited space of a paper, our aim here is to indicate the problematic areas. It is open to criticism. There is but a need to improve the document’s analysis of the mega-trends and its responses. The limitation of such tabulation is to restrict foundational principles to one or the other problems, while the document would actually apply them as a whole to the problems at hand. But, the effort here is to narrow down the relevant foundational principles to deal with problems. It is an attempt to focus on the specificity of the problem and sharpen our foundational principles and highlight the need to work out concrete recommendations.

	cherished cultural values of Asia (#18).	integrity and service beyond conventions (#47).	<i>(PR#2), we do not read a direct recommendation that deals with the problem.</i>
Culture	Ancient cultures are threatened by the globalizing culture that is secular, materialist, hedonist, consumerist, and relativist. There is grave threat to the sense of the sacred, morality, dignity of human life, and the value of family (marriage) (#19).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communion and solidarity of all creation (#36). • God, the source and sustainer of communion (#37). • Centrality of the human person and universal communion (#38). • Jesus' call for justice, integrity, and service beyond conventions (#47). • Paschal mystery, redemption and new creation (#48-50) 	Renew the importance of faith education and value education (PR #2). Dialogue with secular movements (PR #5).
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Economic Poverty: Though there is growth in countries like South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and rising development in Thailand and Malaysia, large part of South and Southeast Asia lag behind due to</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal destination of created goods to all men and all peoples (#40). • Responsible stewardship of the integrity of Creation (#41). • Jesus' preferential option for the 	<i>An invitation for a 'living dialogue with the poor'; promote a culture of evangelical poverty'; 'foster among all pastoral agents, particularly among bishops, priests, and religious, a deep concern for all the poor so as to credibly witness to Jesus' call (PR #3).</i>

	<p><i>poverty.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Poverty of Knowledge: People who are left behind due to lack of proper education. The analysis concludes by stating that poor are realizing God's power and God's good news of blessedness for them (#20).</i> 	<p>poor (#45).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus' call for justice, integrity and service beyond conventions (#47). 	
Migrants and Refugees	<p>Asian migrants and refugees often work under most inhumane conditions; they are exploited and abused and their human rights violated. It is a 'new slavery' (#21).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrality of the human person and universal communion (#38). • Jesus' example in upholding human dignity (#45). • Jesus' proclamation of God's universal love; Centrality of human person (#46). • Jesus' call for justice and service beyond conventions (#47). 	<p>To build a network of pastoral care for migrant workers and itinerant people and their families and to strengthen their faith-formation (PR #8, 9).</p>
Indigenous People	<p>Asia contains two third of world's indigenous people. They face a triple challenge: economic survival, cultural survival, and threats to their</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrality of the human person and universal communion (#38). • Responsible stewardship of the integrity of creation (#41). 	<p><i>A call to provide effective spiritual and pastoral assistance for the integral growth of indigenous people and the preservation of their cultures. Their openness to Gospel is a sign of</i></p>

	land and environment (#22).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus' proclamation about the harmony of creation, the centrality of human person (#46) and redemption (#48-39) 	<i>the time for evangelization (PR #10).</i>
Population	Countries have realized that the poverty and overpopulation in Asia are directly related. So many countries have adopted 'population control concepts and measures' considering it as an economic and demographic issue forgetting its ethical dimension (#23).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrality of the human person and universal communion (#36). • Jesus' commitment to human dignity and human life (#45, 46). 	<i>No direct pastoral recommendation. There is a mention that we should insist the ethical dimension of the issue (#23).</i>
Religious Freedom	Constraints on Christians and problem of Christian persecution due to secularism, atheism, religious intolerance, and extremism (#24).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God is the source and sustainer of communion (#37). • Paschal Mystery, Redemption, New Creation (#48). 	Call for a dialogue with cultures, religions, and secular movements especially between the church in Vietnam and government, and the Holy See and China (#PR 5, 6).
Threats to Life	<i>Ethnic conflicts, violent repression of ethnic rights; murders of activists; police or military encounters; arms race, nuclear threat</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible stewardship of the Integrity of creation (#41). • Centrality of the human person and universal 	<i>To promote a 'culture of life' and promote responsible parenthood and natural family planning. Moreover, to create movements that is pro-life.</i>

	<p>etc. <i>Loss of value of human life – unethical practices like sex determination, artificial contraceptives, genetic engineering, suicide and euthanasia. The unethical problems are greatly caused by secularism and utilitarianism (#25).</i></p>	<p>communion (#38). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paschal Mystery, Redemption, New Creation (#48-49) • Jesus' message of human dignity and centrality of the human person (#45, 46) </p>	<p><i>It invites us to be sensitive to the victims of 'hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, criminal activities, environmental exploitation, violence, war, terrorism, and other similar issues' (PR #4).</i></p>
Social Communication	<p>Powerful impart of secularist, materialist, consumerist, and relativist values and an opportunity for effective evangelization (#26).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal destination of created goods (#40). • Jesus' call for justice, integrity, and service beyond conventions (#47) and his preferential option for the poor (#45). 	<p><i>An indirect effect based on the recommendation to make a prophetically critical and discerning engagement with the modern world (PR #11).</i></p>
Ecology	<p>The ecological question is about global warming and drastic climate changes and need to cultivate intergenerational justice (#27).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible stewardship of the integrity of creation (#41). • Jesus' message about the harmony of creation (#46) and New creation (#48-49). 	<p>To create a new sense of environmental responsibility and inculcate it as a spirituality through a theology of creation (PR #7).</p>
Laity	<p>Increasing need to empower them and strengthen the BECs (#28).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proclaiming the Kingdom of God (#44) 	<p>To draw a concrete plan of action which facilitates active formation of lay in Small</p>

			Christian communities (PR #1)
Women	'Most serious concern are discriminations against women, abuses against women and girl-children as in domestic violence, sex tourism and human trafficking' and the problem of inequality (#29).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communion and solidarity of all creation (#36). • Jesus' message of solidarity and communion (#45). 	
Youth	<i>Danger of losing their sense of transcendence and hope in the wake of secular values</i> (#30).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God, the source and sustainer of communion (#37). • Proclaiming the Kingdom of God (#44) 	
Pentecostalism	<i>The loss of Catholics to emerging evangelical groups</i> (#31)		<i>Indirect impact with the empowerment of laity</i> (PR #1)
Vocations	'springtime of vocations' (#32).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proclaiming the Kingdom of God (#44) 	-

Though not exhaustive, the table highlights the inadequate development of mega-trends in the document and draws attention to those that are well developed. Some trends like 'vocations' and 'Pentecostalism' could have been avoided. The document does not adopt a critical outlook on them. On the other hand, issues related to 'women,' 'indigenous people,' 'culture of violence' and 'neo-liberal colonialism of globalization' suffer an unjust treatment lacking a critical understanding of the problem and a concrete solution. Often we read in the analysis, an exclusive Catholic outlook, but not an inclusive much less a pluralistic conception of the situation in Asia. This is probably a downslide from the orientation of the FABC conference.

3. Relevance and Re-appropriation of the Document's Operative Theologies

Many people want to witness to Christ in some idealized past that they long for with nostalgia. No, we witness to Christ now, here, where we are in our world... Not self-focused, not self-referential... The church's reference to its identity is outside of itself. The church is the pointer to Jesus, the sign of the presence of Jesus, the servant of Jesus. No human being ... should be alien to the church... Part of the church's openness to humanity is to remind the rest of the world of human beings that have been forgotten... Openness to the world means getting ourselves dirty, stained, wounded by the existential realities. The church should smell like the world that it penetrates.⁹

The document cannot be rejected as non-instructive, despite its poor analysis of the mega-trends. The theology that operates within and its implications are prophetic in a time when theology is ready to retreat into a pre-modern milieu estranged from the world. The document can be viewed as drawing trajectories from Vatican II given the mega-trends of Asia. True to the call of Paul VI 'for the Church to engage itself in an ongoing self-critical examination,'¹⁰ the document makes an examination of the church of its creative fidelity to the Magisterium and its relevance to the Asian context. At the end, it draws a new resolve to be a renewed church in response to new situation that demands a re-incarnation of Christ and his living presence, the Church.

The overall framework is contextual theology. It takes history and culture as the flesh that offers room for the 'incarnation of the word.' Thus, it overcomes the fallacy of dualism present in the world. Like a prophet it facilitates the building of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Hence it generally calls itself as the Church, which like disciples of the Lord is in mission (#51-56). We shall critically examine the operative theologies and philosophies of the document in two steps: first, we expose the theoretical orientation of the document (philosophy and theology) and second, we review it in the light of contemporary developments in ecclesiology.

⁹Excerpts from Cardinal Luis Tagle's address in a theological conference titled "Vatican II, Remembering the Impact and Promise," co-hosted by Georgetown, Marymount University in Arlington, Va., Washington on 21 May, 2016 as reported by Joshua J. McElwee, "Cardinal Tagle: Church Should not Look to 'Idealized Past' with Nostalgia", *National Catholic Reporter*, May 22, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/global/cardinal-tagle-church-should-not-look-idealized-past-nostalgia>

¹⁰Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time*, Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007, 195.

3.1. Theoretical Orientations (Operative Theologies/Philosophies)

3.1.1. Post-colonial Inclusivism

One can identify in the orientation of the document, a deep sense of respect towards the 'richness' of the tradition: "In mysterious and invisible ways from time immemorial to the present day the creative and renewing Spirit of God continues to stir among Asian peoples and cultures as it hovers over the Asian continent" (#1). The document acknowledges the wealth of the Asian cultures and religious traditions. This is evident in its commitment to protect the values and cultures of indigenous traditions despite its uncompromising stand on evangelizing them (#22, PR #10), in that case evangelizing Asia about the story of Jesus (#51).

In its self-description, it repeatedly denotes its 'Asian-ness'; in its approach it is always dialogical (#11) carefully overcoming universalist colonial tendencies. Hence it adapts a methodology, in its pastoral action, that regards 'Asian realities as resources' and always sensitive to the pluralism of cultures especially to those that are, in the words of the document, 'outside the Gate' (#12). The document, thus resists the neo-colonial homogenous culture in globalization (#18, 19); realizes the urgency to find an alternative (#19); and commits to educate young people to critical consumers of the emerging values of the society (#26, 30, PR #2).

3.1.2. Dialogical Church/Church-in-Dialogue

As a necessary consequence of inclusivism, the nature and method of the Church is necessarily dialogical. The document calls it as 'living triple dialogue with the poor, cultures and religious and philosophical traditions' (#5). The sensitivity to the poor that forms part of the dialogue is the fruit of the post-colonial (liberational) character of its theology. The document re-affirms its sensitivity to the poor in the vision (#11) and in pastoral recommendation for dialogue and peace (PR #5, 6). Theological implications of such an approach is that in Asia the Catholic Church believes that it partakes in the mission of the Triune God. It says, "Ultimately it is the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit who builds his house — the Church and Cosmos. With his grace we are co-builders..." (#56).

The document indicates that the Church in Asia is not 'ecclesiocentric' but 'theocentric' and 'regiocentric'. This is seen in the orientation of the document which paves way toward a deconstruction of the concept of evangelization. Other than the traditional understanding of evangelization, in the document we find ripples of a new understanding that is relevant to the multicultural context of our

society. It is making people conscious of the religious and moral character of the world where God dwells in many and various ways and through it we establish righteousness and justice (#53).

3.1.3. Church in Solidarity and Communion

Another major theme that runs across the document is the interconnectedness and interdependence of the Creation. The document speaks of the communion of the creation (#36) with God as its source and sustainer (#37), Jesus as a forerunner of solidarity and communion (#45), and finally Church as a living place of the spirituality of communion (#55). As a result, the document asks the Church in Asia to commit itself to promote 'a culture of life' in the face of 'a culture of death' (#19, 23, PR #4). It spearheads the significance of family life (#19). It stresses the importance of the collaboration of clergy and laity in its mission (# 28).

It would be meaningful then to discern in this sense of solidarity and interdependence the moral urgency for the document's careful attention to the plight of the poor (#20), the environment (#27), migrants and refugees (#21), indigenous people (#22), war, arms race, ethnic conflicts, protection of vulnerable lives (#25), and finally discriminations and violence against women (#29). We find that the document presents redemption and new creation as 'cosmic harmony established by cosmic Christ' (#49). It recommends the local churches to facilitate a dissemination of the theology of creation and environmental spirituality (PR #7).

3.2. Critical Examination for New Directions

Our criticism of the directions of the theology is in response to the context that, like the *other*, demands a re-appropriation of our church-self for an authentic presence of Jesus Christ in the world. There is probably a need for further nuanced articulation of Asian context in the document. It could have paid more attention to the sufferings and human rights violation of people who for one reason or the other do not have sexual orientations of the mainstream. Though there is an implied reading of the pluralism and multi-culturalism of the post-colonial era, the document seems to ignore the implications of such a situation. We are living in a situation where plurality of cultures and the *different other* claim not only equal treatment, but also recognition and respect for one's particular habits, practices and traditions. So we do not any more live in a Christian world that tolerates differences, instead as Christians we form part of the multiplicity of cultural worlds.¹¹

¹¹Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*, 209-210.

The openness that is expected of the Church is not just inclusivism but pluralism to cope with the dynamics of the world. There is a need to shift to democratic, human rights, and liberal tradition to accommodate the developments in the socio-political and economical philosophies. Gerard Mannion is instructive here. After a long critical exposition of the case of ecclesiology in our era in his *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*, he opts out of pre-modern and modern ecclesiological models to dispositional/virtue ecclesiology.¹² He chooses to place ecclesiology at the service of the kingdom of God, he calls it 'love' — Church at the service of love. It would be the end (*telos*) that guides the Church to discern its role in the given context.¹³ This is true in the case of Asian Church. Given the plurality of cultures and contexts, we must make a collaborative effort to establish the kingdom of God with the help of other brethren. Overlaps and cross-fertilizations, as a result, are inevitable.¹⁴

The pressing question is to re-examine FABC's functioning rooted in the tradition of Vatican II. It is evident that in its post-colonial inclusivism, dialogical method, and deep sense of solidarity and communion, it has incarnated Vatican II in Asia. The concerns of *Lumen Gentium*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *Nostra Aetate*, and *Gaudium et Spes* form an integral part of the document under study. The limitation of FABC is its 'poor' insight into the vicissitudes of the time and its monolithic outlook. Probably, this explains the flaws in its theologizing on Asian milieu in the document. We intend to recommend dimensions that might help us overcome such shortcomings in our theologizing: 1) theology needs to become interdisciplinary to get right understanding of the complexity of reality; 2) the realization that kingdom of God is a fruit of a collaborative effort of everyone; 3) the need to move beyond demands of collegiality, ecumenical relations, and interreligious sensitivity to a radical commitment to plurality of the world; 4) since the reality is complex, the Church can learn to be fluid swift to re-appropriate the church-self to the signs of the times; and 5) there cannot be a universal soteriology instead soteriologies that are contextual but faithful to the scripture, tradition and the kingdom of God. Such a transformation would probably keep the Church in Asia relevant and concretely contributive in the present era.

¹²Mannion adapts virtue ethics tradition: we must learn to acquire 'dispositions/virtues' that would help us discern the right response to a particular situation. Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*, 220.

¹³Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*, 223 ff.

¹⁴Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*, 228 ff.