

# RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND TURN TO THE SPIRIT

## FABC's and Gavin D'Costa's Theology of Religions

Ruben C. Mendoza ♦

### 1. Introduction

Among the recent approaches to religious pluralism is what has been called “the turn to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Theologians who employ the pneumatological approach regard it as a way out of the traditional impasses that have hindered developments in the theology of religions.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong identifies three advantages of a pneumatological approach to other religions.<sup>3</sup> First, he considers pneumatology as the key to overcoming the dualism between Christological particularity and the cosmic Christ. The either/or of particularity/universality dissolves when one recalls that the historical Jesus was who he was because of the Spirit of God and that the risen Christ was resurrected by the power of the Spirit. Second, pneumatology is the key to understanding the tension between what has traditionally been labelled specific and natural revelation. While it does not deny these categories, pneumatology emphasizes the dynamism of revelation and salvation rather than dualisms. Third, pneumatology enables us to transcend questions related to other religions not merely as human efforts to reach the divine because this approach emphasizes the universality of the Spirit and the dynamic nature of divine activity. Thus, Yong sees pneumatological approach as offering a way of moving the conversation forward.

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♦**Ruben C. Mendoza** finished his PhD in Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. At present, he is an assistant professor with the Department of Theology of the Ateneo de Manila University. FABC is the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church.

<sup>1</sup>Clark Pinnock, *Religious Pluralism: A Turn to the Holy Spirit*, 27 March 2008 <<http://www.mcmaster.ca/mjtm/5-4.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup>Paul F. Knitter, “A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions,” *Current Dialogue* 19 (January 1991): 32-41; Amos Yong, “The Turn to Pneumatology in Christian Theology of Religions: Conduit or Detour?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35 (1998), 437-54; Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic and Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003.

<sup>3</sup>Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 47-49.

This turn to the Spirit also characterizes the theology of certain Roman Catholic personalities and institutions. For example, Jacques Dupuis and Gerald O'Collins regard the unique contribution of Pope John Paul II as his emphasis on the presence of the Spirit in the religious life of peoples of other faiths.<sup>4</sup> As Clark Pinnock puts it,

For John Paul, the reason why there are spiritual treasures in the religions of the world, why there is a sense of kinship, and why dialogue is promising, is the reality of the Holy Spirit, who is alive and active in world history, both before and after Christ, and who inspires the searchings of humankind. He believes that, while there are many religions in the world, there is one Spirit seeking to bear fruit in them all.<sup>5</sup>

This approach has also been taken up by both Gavin D'Costa and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in their theological reflections on the religious other. In both of their theologies of religions, there is a strong emphasis on the role of the Spirit in others.

In this article, I would like to compare their theologies of religions, focusing only on the pneumatological dimension of their theologies.<sup>6</sup> I will confine my discussion on four issues with respect to their positions: (1) the salvific character of other religions; (2) their theological starting points; (3) the parameters in thinking of the Spirit in others; and (4) the fulfilment of the church and the religious other in their dialogue with each other.

## 2. The Salvific Character of Other Religions

D'Costa's contends that while the documents of Vatican II affirm the presence of supernatural saving grace in other religions and of the "true, the good and the holy" in them, and thus the possibility of salvation for their adherents, Vatican II's deliberate silence on the status of other religions as *per se* vehicles of salvation prohibits "any unqualified positive

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<sup>4</sup>Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, 173; Gerald O'Collins, "John Paul II on Christ, the Holy Spirit and World Religions," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (2007), 323-37.

<sup>5</sup>Pinnock, *Religious Pluralism*.

<sup>6</sup>The FABC does not offer a sophisticated theology like D'Costa; the FABC is pastoral in its intent and character ["What the Spirit Says to the Churches (Rev 2:7). A Vademecum on the Pastoral and Theological Orientations of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 62 (1998), 124-33] while D'Costa is a professional systematic theologian. Nevertheless, one can discern and glean from the FABC's pastoral documents a particular theological orientation and position which can be compared with D'Costa's theology. *Journal of Dharma* 35, 1 (January-March 2010)

affirmation of other religions as salvific structures, or as containing divine revelation.”<sup>7</sup> For D’Costa, this reading of the Conciliar documents is validated by two of John Paul II’s writings, *Redemptoris Missio* and *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. D’Costa interprets the late Pope’s position as involving the following claims: that other religions are not independent means to supernatural grace, that the action of the Holy Spirit in them cannot be understood apart from Christ, the Trinity and the Church, and that there can be no *a priori* affirmation of this presence but that this must be decided upon *a posteriori*.<sup>8</sup>

Like D’Costa, the FABC affirms the presence of the Spirit in other religious traditions. In its reflections on interreligious dialogue, the FABC has echoed *Nostra Aetate*’s respect for “those ways of acting and living and those precepts and teachings which, though often at variance with what it holds and expounds, frequently reflect a ray of that truth which

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<sup>7</sup>Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000, 105. Refer also, Gavin D’Costa, “Revelation and Revelations: Discerning God in Other Religions – Beyond a Static Valuation,” *Modern Theology* 10 (1994), 165-83.

<sup>8</sup>D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions*, 105-109. In contrast to D’Costa, Karl Rahner considered this point as being left open by *Nostra Aetate* (NA). It is an issue that needs further maturation, debate and dialogue among theologians, the magisterium and the Christian community in general (Karl Rahner, “On the Importance of Non-Christian Religions for Salvation,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18, trans. Edward Quinn, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984, 288-95). Since the religious traditions of the world have different religious ends (refer S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001 and S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), which are incommensurable with the Christian understanding of salvation, Daniel Madigan proposes that the question, “Are other religions *per se* salvific?,” be rephrased to, “Are there elements in this religion that God appears to be using to save people?” In this way, there is no single, *a priori*, answer to the question of the salvific value of other religions. One can only give an *a posteriori* judgment based on the presence of the fruits of the Spirit and the values of the Kingdom in the followers of a particular religion. Such a judgement cannot or need not be made about the whole religion but rather about its individual elements. For Madigan, this may help explain NA’s tendency to list the positive elements of other religions while avoiding general assessments [Daniel A. Madigan, “*Nostra Aetate* and the Questions It Chose to Leave Open,” *Gregorianum* 87 (2006), 781-96].

enlightens everyone.”<sup>9</sup> While it recognizes the Spirit’s presence in other faiths, the Asian bishops appear to take Vatican II’s position on the role of other religions farther when it states:

In this dialogue we accept them [other religions] as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meaning 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...

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?<sup>10</sup>

Although it does not explicitly state that other religions *per se* are salvific, the FABC apparently affirms a more significant and greater role to them than D’Costa. The FABC firmly believes in the universal salvific will of God, a grace that is freely offered to every person, including peoples of other faiths. At the same time, it recognizes the existential reality that many peoples of other faiths who come into contact with Jesus Christ and the Church in Asia do not become Christians but remain in their own traditions to which they adhere devoutly. For the FABC this situation is not merely a sociological reality but is indicative of God’s plan for these believers, a reflection of the mysterious and unfathomable grace of salvation. While the FABC does not specify the means that God gives to every person for her or his redemption, it seems that a concrete way in which other believers do participate in God’s life is through their own religious traditions. In other words, other religious traditions have salvific value. This is implied as much by the following prayer of FABC I:

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<sup>9</sup>Vatican II, NA 2. For the FABC’s reception of NA, see Ruben C. Mendoza, “‘Ray of Truth That Enlightens All’: *Nostra Aetate* and Its Reception by the FABC,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 16 (2006), 148-72. For Dupuis, “The ‘seeds of the Word’ present in other religious experiences and traditions are *touches of the Spirit of God*, a ‘sort of secret divine presence’ (*Ad Gentes* 9); this in the last analysis is why members of the Church are exhorted by her to ‘acknowledge, preserve and promote’ (NA 2) through dialogue the spiritual values found among them” Jacques Dupuis, “The Church, the Reign of God, and the ‘Others,’” *FABC Papers* 67 (1993), 22.

<sup>10</sup>FABC First Plenary Assembly, 14-15 (hereafter, FABC I), in Catalino Arévalo and Gaudencio Rosales, eds., *For All the Peoples in Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1970-1991*, vol. 1 (hereafter, FAPA I) Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992, 14.

Christ of the peoples of Asia, humbly we beg you to make use of us to reveal yourself more and more to them. You have been present already in their histories and traditions. In hidden ways you have led them, because for them too, you are the Way. In ways unknown to us you have enlightened them in their worship, in their beliefs, their philosophies, since for them, too, you are the Truth. In diverse manners you have already made yourself present in their lives, for you are their Life. From the beginning you have called our peoples, and from your Cross you have drawn them to yourself.<sup>11</sup>

In this prayer, the FABC affirms the centrality of Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all the peoples of Asia while at the same time, it profoundly recognizes the mysterious presence of this Christ in the lives, histories, traditions, beliefs and philosophies of the Asian peoples. In mysterious ways, this Christ has led them, enlightened them and made himself present to them. The role of religions is further stressed by Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/7) when it claims: “The great religions of Asia with their respective creeds, cults and codes reveal to us diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, it appears that, for the FABC, other religious traditions are means through which other believers encounter God in their lives.<sup>13</sup> For instance, as regards Buddhism, the First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs states, “We recognize in the personal lives of Buddhists, as well as in their total religious life, the activity of the Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Then, with regard to Islam, the Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia (CCPMA) stated,

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<sup>11</sup>FABC I, 46, FAPA I, 19.

<sup>12</sup>BIRA IV/7, 12, FAPA I, 310.

<sup>13</sup>In his commentary on the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue’s *Dialogue and Proclamation* 29, Dupuis states: “It means, in effect, that the members of other religions are not saved by Christ in spite of, or beside, their own tradition, but in it and in some mysterious way, “known to God,” through it. If further elaborated theologically, this statement would be seen to imply some hidden presence – no matter how imperfect – of the mystery of Jesus Christ in these religious traditions in which salvation reaches their adherents.” Jacques Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary Dialogue and Proclamation” in William Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993, 137. This appears to be also the point of the FABC with regard to Christ’s presence in other traditions.

<sup>14</sup>First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs 6, FAPA I, 110.

In the mysterious and providential plan of God Islam possesses a salvific and liberating purpose... the genuine beliefs and practices of Muslims form the vehicle of God's favor to them and constitute the basis of their human communion and action.<sup>15</sup>

However, it needs to be said that the genuineness of this encounter necessarily demands critical discernment on the part of the Church. This critical dimension is seen in the FABC's effort to avoid any kind of indifferentism. As the Hindu-Christian Dialogue on Harmony states, "To say that all religions are the same is simplistic and does not promote honest dialogue ..."<sup>16</sup> In other words, there must be due regard for the differences that exist between the different religious traditions and these differences are not to be brushed aside but are integral parts of the dialogue. The Tenth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/10) underlines the call "to respect other religions, but while doing so we need to avoid giving the impression that all religions are equal."<sup>17</sup> An apparent implication of this statement is that there are some religions which truly manifest the workings of the Spirit, but at the same time, there are elements within them which seem to promote and foster "un-Kingdom-like" values and thus, are questionable. Differences do exist between the religions but they should not in any way prevent the Church from reaching out to others. These differences provide fodder for the Church's discernment of God's plan for them and for the Church in relation with each other.

From the above, one can see that the FABC's theologizing on peoples of other faiths is not a question of whether or not they can be saved. Salvation is already acknowledged by the bishops as attainable by them. The question for the FABC concerns their meaning in the single plan of God for salvation in which human persons and communities participate in diverse ways *and* the place of Christianity in a religiously pluralistic world.<sup>18</sup> Since the diversity of religions belongs to God's plan

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<sup>15</sup>Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia 8, FAPA I, 165.

<sup>16</sup>Hindu-Christian Dialogue on Harmony 7, FAPA II, 158.

<sup>17</sup>BIRA IV/10, 10, FAPA I, 314.

<sup>18</sup>For Wilfred, the shift in the location of the question from how Christianity can relate to other religions to the place of Christianity in a religiously plural setting implies two things. First, the relationship between religions cannot be considered in the abstract or conceptual level but involves the context of the wider world with its struggles, problems, issues and hopes. Second, we can only enter into dialogue if our question is not Christianity-centred. Rather, our focus should be on questions of what  
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of salvation,<sup>19</sup> what is this fact teaching us as Church about God and other believers? This is the question for the FABC, one that cannot simply be answered *a priori* but demands that the Church engage peoples of other faiths in dialogue, a point that the FABC shares with D’Costa.

### 3. Theological Starting Point

While one finds in both the FABC and D’Costa a turn to the Spirit in understanding and interpreting the reality of religious pluralism, their methodological starting point is different. In theologizing about other religious traditions, D’Costa underlines the importance of his social location as a Roman Catholic theologian. He considers his tradition-specific approach as essential in proposing his own Trinitarian theology of religions. For him, “all theology is tradition-specific” and being such, it “shapes the manner of our theologizing, its methods, presuppositions, goals, and objectives.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it is “an attempt to theologically reflect within the parameters of the church’s teachings on such issues”<sup>21</sup> – what D’Costa refers to as “controlling beliefs” within which any faithful theology must remain.<sup>22</sup> While he initially used Alan Race’s three-fold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism and argued for inclusivism early in his theological career,<sup>23</sup> he rejects this typology in his later writings and argues for a form of Roman Catholic orientation in relation to other religions.<sup>24</sup> Against the pluralists he contends “that no non-tradition-specific approach can exist, and such an apparently neutral disembodied location is in fact the tradition-specific starting-point of

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we can assume, adapt and integrate from other traditions into our own faith (Felix Wilfred, “Dialogue Gasping for Breath? Towards New Frontiers in Interreligious Dialogue,” *FABC Papers* 49 (1987), 32-33.

<sup>19</sup>Second Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs 3.1 (hereafter, FIRA II), in Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples in Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. Documents from 1991-1996*, vol. 2 (hereafter FAPA II), Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997, 126-27.

<sup>20</sup>Gavin D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 3.

<sup>21</sup>Gavin D’Costa, “Revelation and World Religions,” in Paul Avis, ed., *Divine Revelation*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997, 114.

<sup>22</sup>D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 3.

<sup>23</sup>Gavin D’Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

<sup>24</sup>Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000, 101-17; D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 3-37.

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liberal modernity, what MacIntyre calls the Encyclopedic tradition.”<sup>25</sup> With regard to inclusivism, he suggests that it collapses logically into exclusivism.<sup>26</sup> Thus, D’Costa rejects the three-fold typology as unhelpful, and advocates his own version of tradition-specificity, rooting his theology of religions in the official documents of the Catholic Church. In his analysis, he concludes that both inclusivism and pluralism are not sanctioned by Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents.

For D’Costa, every theological position is exclusivist. He seems to espouse what he refers to as “universal-access exclusivism.”<sup>27</sup> According to him, “This inevitable contingent point of departure means that any Christian position advanced on these questions must be rooted in, and accountable to, an ecclesial community.”<sup>28</sup> As he puts it, “I am a Roman Catholic theologian who believes theology is an ecclesial discipline, accountable first to God (in His revelation to us), the church (traditions, councils, magisterium, the sense of the faithful, reason), and finally to all women and men of good will who show any interest in what the church is about (‘people of good will’ is the novel jargon in official documents in the twentieth century).”<sup>29</sup> D’Costa takes as his starting point and as sources for his theologizing as a Roman Catholic the official teachings of the church. For example, he interprets the documents of Vatican II on other religions in light of subsequent magisterial documents of John Paul II and justifies his position based on them. In another work, he creatively uses an article of the Apostle’s Creed, “he descended into hell,” to deal with the question of salvation for those who are not evangelized without denying Christ’s necessity for salvation.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, while he himself is

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<sup>25</sup>D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions*, 19; cf. Gavin D’Costa, “Whose Objectivity? Whose Neutrality? The Doomed Quest for a Neutral Vantage Point from Which to Judge Religions,” *Religious Studies* 29 (1993), 79-85.

<sup>26</sup>D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions*, 22-24.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 29-33, 162.

<sup>28</sup>D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions*, 12.

<sup>29</sup>D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 4. While I agree with him that there is a need for accountability to the ecclesial community, it seems to me that D’Costa in his argumentation puts his emphasis on the church’s magisterial teachings. While magisterial documents are an integral part of the Catholic faith and of the ecclesial community, the ecclesial community is not limited to the voice of the magisterium. Hence, there is a need to give proper due to other voices in the community and to engage in a common search for truth.

<sup>30</sup>D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 161-211.



engaged in interreligious dialogue, it does not appear that the reality of other religions *per se* is a source of theologizing.

In contrast, the FABC begins its theologizing with a reading of the life situation of the Asian people – the signs of the times of the peoples in general and the church’s experiences of the religious other in particular. For the Asian bishops, the enormous influence of these religions in the histories and cultures of Asians is self-evident and it is only but necessary to include them in the task of theologizing. Given this starting point, the FABC’s theology of religions is rooted in and is a product of the Asian bishops’ efforts to make sense of the Christian faith in a multi-religious context. In contrast to D’Costa’s exclusivist position, the FABC appears to position itself – to use D’Costa’s own label – as a “structural inclusivist.”

Tradition-specificity is an issue that appears to be presupposed in the Asian bishops’ theology of religions. It is precisely because the Christian tradition is important that the FABC has sought to inculturate this tradition in Asian soil. The difficulty of many Asians with the Christian faith is that this tradition has come to Asia with its Western garb; consequently, they are not able to identify themselves with it. Hence, the bishops have stressed the need for dialogue with the cultures of Asia.<sup>31</sup> In this way, one can perhaps speak of theology not merely as tradition-specific but also as context-specific – given the importance the bishops place on context and the signs of the times. For the bishops, it is not a matter of whether the church is to proclaim Jesus Christ or not but it is a question of *how* to proclaim him. In this process, they not only use sacred tradition and sacred scripture but also include the contextual realities of Asia as *loci theologici* where the Spirit is also actively present.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, D’Costa makes a reference to the Asian bishops when he insists that if ever the church is to acknowledge that it has learned from other religions, it should do so only on the basis of the church’s engagement with other religions. He states that it may only be a matter of time before the magisterium does this, an acknowledgement that is similar to what the church already did, D’Costa maintains, with regard to modernity in *Gaudium et Spes* §44. For him, the FABC is an example of local churches that have reflected and discerned on their encounters with

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. FABC I, 12, FAPA I, 14.

<sup>32</sup>Franz-Josef Eilers, *For All the Peoples in Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. Documents from 1997-2001*, vol. 3 (hereafter FAPA III), Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002, 329-419.

others.<sup>33</sup> He rejects any form of *a priorism* that affirms the Spirit's presence in others without any historical engagement with them. In this regard, what the FABC has done in its discernment of the Spirit in others is commendable and is exactly what D'Costa argues for.

So while the FABC and D'Costa differ in terms of their theological starting point – the former affirming and attempting to do local theology and the latter emphasizing magisterial teachings, both of them affirm the necessity encountering the religious other. One sees the necessity of interreligious dialogue being constantly emphasized by the various statements of the FABC. It is a dialogue that takes as its starting point the reality that Christians, who are insignificant numerically in Asia, live their lives in daily contact with peoples of other faiths. Dialogue in this sense would be making explicit and thematized the faith-dimension of what would otherwise be normal day-to-day encounters of neighbours who happen to belong to different religious traditions. For D'Costa, the necessity of historical engagement is part of the church's effort to come "to a fuller confession and witness to the truth, which it never possesses."<sup>34</sup> In dialogue with the other, the church discerns the voice of God in the other as the Spirit speaks to the church in and through the other. In doing so, the church opens itself up to the unfolding of God's plan for humankind and the entire creation.

#### **4. Parameters of Thinking of the Spirit in Others**

Crucial to D'Costa's theology of religions is his contention that any talk of the Spirit in other religions must be both christologically and ecclesiologically oriented. He argues that Jesus Christ and the church are the necessary parameters in understanding and interpreting the activity of the Spirit in others. For D'Costa, just as the Spirit moulds Christians in becoming more Christ-like, the Spirit too has the role of making those outside the church, e.g. those who belong to other religions, also Christ-like, even if they are unaware of it or despite what is found in their religious tradition. At the same time, the Spirit is inseparable from the church; for the very soul of the church is the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit is

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<sup>33</sup>D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions*, 112.

<sup>34</sup>Gavin D'Costa, "Roundtable Review of *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity*, by Gavin D'Costa," *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 8 (2001), 246.  
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inseparable from both Christ and the church, just as there is “the indissoluble bond between Christology and ecclesiology.”<sup>35</sup>

One finds a similar assertion in the FABC. The Third Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/3) argues for the inseparability of the Spirit from Christ: “What is done in the name of the Holy Spirit must be in keeping with the life, teachings and mission of Jesus Christ... What the Spirit does, and continues to do, is inseparable from what Christ said and did.”<sup>36</sup> After all, as pointed out by the different FABC reflections on the Spirit, the Spirit not only comes from Christ but the Spirit is also the Spirit of Christ. In terms of the ecclesiological parameter, the FABC grounds the discernment of the Spirit’s presence in others in terms of the church as the interpreting body of the Christ-event. BIRA IV/3 states further: “Any discernment of the Spirit ...stands in relation to the Church’s memory and interpretation of the reality of Jesus Christ. The Church’s accumulated wisdom and insights into the Christ event have exerted a formative and normative influence upon the life and mission/ministry of the Christian community.”<sup>37</sup> In this way then, the FABC ties up the Christological and ecclesiological dimension of the discernment of the Spirit in others. However, unlike D’Costa, the FABC, while acknowledging the Trinitarian foundation of the church in its Third Plenary Assembly<sup>38</sup> apparently does not explicitly refer to the Trinity as the reason for the ecclesiological orientation of its pneumatology. Rather, in BIRA IV/3, its ecclesiological orientation is based on the authority of the church as the community to which the deposit of faith has been committed.

In emphasizing the necessity of the different ways of responding to the Spirit to be in conversation with one another, the Asian bishops point to what they perceive as the crucial role of one’s context. For them, the different perceptions of the Spirit’s presence are due to the variety of contexts in which people live. In other words, even it is the same Spirit present and active in others, a people of one culture respond differently to the Spirit from a people of another culture due to the different circumstances of their lives and histories. In effect, the bishops are

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<sup>35</sup>Gavin D’Costa, “Review of *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, by Jacques Dupuis,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998), 911.

<sup>36</sup>BIRA IV/3, 11, FAPA I, 260.

<sup>37</sup>BIRA IV/3, 13, FAPA I, 260.

<sup>38</sup>FABC Third Plenary Assembly 6-7, FAPA I, 56-57.

stressing here two things: first, the Spirit operates in the concrete circumstances of a person's or a people's life, not apart from it; and second, one's culture and history influences how an individual or a people perceive and respond to the Spirit. Hence, the bishops affirm a stance of *receptive pluralism*.<sup>39</sup>

One does not find any such acknowledgement on D'Costa's part with regard to the importance of context in this dialogue, except perhaps in terms of his emphasis on the need to historically engage other traditions in dialogue. For D'Costa, the parameter within which such a dialogue could take place is Christian revelation, particularly in terms of the inseparability and interrelatedness of the church's teachings on the Trinity, Christology and ecclesiology.

Evidently, theologizing here is taking place at different levels. While they do not necessarily contradict one another, it seems to me that the Asian bishops, while they may agree with his theological interpretation, would not approach the question in the way D'Costa does. For the bishops, biblical and theological interpretation cannot and should not take place apart from the historical context in which the local churches of Asia live their discipleship. For them, it is precisely where one is that one takes as a starting point in understanding and interpreting revelation. In other words, they take history seriously as a locus of Christian theologizing.

Nevertheless, D'Costa's turn to the Spirit implies the necessity of this conversation. In affirming the Spirit's presence in others, the Spirit speaks to the church in order that it may come to a deeper appreciation and appropriation of the gospel in its life. This "speaking" may very well be expressed in the very tradition and practices of the other, ways which are different from their expressions in the church. This is why at the same time the church as the community of the Spirit and as the community that seeks the Spirit has also something to share to its dialogue partner with regard to the Spirit in its life as church and in the life of the other. As D'Costa has taken pains to emphasize, the very content of this dialogue as a fulfilment of both Christianity and the other cannot be predicted or stipulated *a priori*. This point leads us to the next section.

## **5. Mutual Enrichment/Fulfilment for the Church and Other Religions**

The FABC speaks of both fulfilment and mutual enrichment in relation to other religions. For instance, the Second Bishops' Institute for

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<sup>39</sup>BIRA IV/3, 16, FAPA I, 261.

Interreligious Affairs (BIRA II) states: “The Church, the sacrament of God’s mercy in the world, continues Christ’s work of dialogue. Her duty is to proclaim the reign of God, to bring the proclamation of this message into every aspect of human life, and to seek *the fulfilment of all things in Christ*.”<sup>40</sup> In a sense, “the fulfilment of all things in Christ” is God’s plan for the whole of creation and is the basic theological reason underlying its statements with regard to interreligious dialogue as leading to mutual enrichment.

Moreover, the FABC has consistently affirmed mutual enrichment in its statements on interreligious dialogue. It is not only Christianity which has something to share and proclaim to others but Christians can also learn from peoples of other religions, a learning that enables them to live their faith more fully and more faithfully.<sup>41</sup> Since it is open to mutual criticism,<sup>42</sup> dialogue “enables both participants to purify and deepen their respective faith commitments and thus become more open to ever more abundant movements of God’s grace.”<sup>43</sup> The very first meeting of the Asian bishops, the Asian Bishops Meeting, affirmed this mutuality when it stated that, in dialogue, one learns from one another how to enrich each other spiritually.<sup>44</sup>

Four years later, FABC I elaborates on what this enrichment is:

This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and 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 the many riches of our 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.<sup>45</sup>

In this text, two points are worth noting. First, the bishops underline the interrelatedness of interreligious dialogue with inculturation. As the church engages in dialogue, the local church necessarily grows in its rootedness in its own culture and is enabled to express and live its Christian faith in a way that is truly culturally-rooted. The Third Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA III) puts it in the following manner:

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<sup>40</sup>BIRA II, 11, FAPA I, 115, emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup>CCPMA 26-27, FAPA I, 169-70; Sixth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/6) 3, FAPA I, 304.

<sup>42</sup>BIRA IV/6, 6, FAPA I, 304.

<sup>43</sup>CCPMA 16, FAPA I, 168.

<sup>44</sup>Asian Bishops’ Meeting, Resolution 12, FAPA I, 9.

<sup>45</sup>FABC I, 16, FAPA I, 14-15.

“Dialogue ... facilitates the incarnation of the Good News in the various cultures creating new ways of life, action, worship and reflection, so as to help the growth of the local Churches and to realize the catholicity and fullness of the mystery of Christ.”<sup>46</sup> Second, its encounter with the other enables the church to know aspects of its faith that it would not have realized without the other and in the process, live its faith in a more meaningful way. In other words, “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.”<sup>47</sup> Here, there is recognition on the part of the bishops that part of the process of inculturation is not only the rooting of one’s faith in one’s culture but also the purification of one’s culture itself since it may have elements that are contrary to the gospel message. As each local church responds to the demands of the Gospel, “each people’s history, each people’s culture, meanings and values, each people’s traditions are taken up, not diminished nor destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified if need be, and fulfilled (as the Second Vatican Council teaches) in the life of the Spirit.”<sup>48</sup> In this process, there is a need to continue “the process of re-imagining the Christian faith in the light of Asian realities in order to birth new symbols, rituals, language and expressions that are truly Asian in flavour and character.”<sup>49</sup> According to Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,

We have no right to judge the commitment of the other since faith is the expression of the encounter of the infinitely human spirit with the unfathomable mystery of God. This is why listening attentively with our heart to the personal commitment of faith and witness of the other partner cannot only facilitate dialogue, but also enrich us and make us grow in our faith, and help us to reinterpret it.<sup>50</sup>

For the FABC, at the heart of mutual enrichment is the spirituality of the various religious traditions. For FABC Second Plenary Assembly, Christian prayer and spirituality offer its own gifts to other religious traditions. At the same time, the prayer and spirituality of these traditions “can contribute much to our spirituality which, while remaining truly

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<sup>46</sup>BIRA III, 5, FAPA I, 120.

<sup>47</sup>FABC I, 17, FAPA I, 15.

<sup>48</sup>International Congress on Mission 15, FAPA I, 130.

<sup>49</sup>First Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs 2.10, FAPA III, 121.

<sup>50</sup>Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue 11, FAPA I, 310.

Christian, can yet be greatly enriched,” particularly in the stress of these religions on “a deeper awareness of God and the whole self in recollection, silence and prayer, flowering in openness to others, in compassion, non-violence, generosity.”<sup>51</sup> For the bishops, dialogue involves not only a deepening of “our common realization of the Truth, but also a common commitment to assure a religious dimension to people’s quest for a fuller life of peace in freedom, fellowship and justice.”<sup>52</sup> In particular, the FABC sees this enrichment as happening in Hindu-Christian dialogue, Muslim-Christian dialogue, Buddhist-Christian dialogue and Taoist-Christian dialogue.<sup>53</sup> For FIRA II, “in authentic interreligious dialogue we must [be] open to mutual conversion, each side aiding the other in being more faithful to the truth.”<sup>54</sup> Moreover, “To speak the Word of God’s truth in Christ, we also have to listen to what our neighbours of other faiths wish to speak to us.”<sup>55</sup> For BIRA IV/10, in striving for a holistic realization of harmony with others, there is a need to turn not only to Christian resources but also to that of others.<sup>56</sup> Just as being a dialogical community is an enriching experience, the bishops are also aware that “it can also be an unsettling challenge, for if dialogue is essential to our being Church in Asia and to loving our brothers and sisters of other faiths, then anything that obstructs such dialogue must be questioned and re-examined.”<sup>57</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

D’Costa’s dialectical understanding of fulfilment squares with the Asian bishops’ emphasis on mutual enrichment. He makes a crucial point about the category of fulfilment in light of *Gaudium et Spes* §44, when he notes that “it is not only other religions that are fulfilled in (and in one sense, radically transformed) their *preparatio* being completed through Christianity, but also Christianity itself is fulfilled in receiving the gift of God that the Other might bear, self-consciously or not.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, his is not a

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<sup>51</sup>FABC Second Plenary Assembly 35, FAPA I, 35.

<sup>52</sup>BIRA III, 5, FAPA I, 120.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. BIRA III, 10-16, FAPA I, 121-22; CCPMA 9, 26-27, FAPA I, 167, 169-0; BIRA II, 4-5, FAPA I, 114; A Call to Harmony 7, FAPA II, 152-53; Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia 6, FAPA II, 165.

<sup>54</sup>FIRA II 3.6, FAPA III, 129.

<sup>55</sup>FIRA II 3.7, FAPA III, 129.

<sup>56</sup>BIRA IV/10 5, FAPA I, 314.

<sup>57</sup>FIRA II 3.8, FAPA III, 130.

<sup>58</sup>D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions*, 114.

unilateral view of fulfilment but one that is dialectical. Moreover, since it is the Spirit within other religions that may be calling the church to a deeper penetration into, a better understanding and a more faithful living of God's revelation, the church needs to be attentive to this Spirit in them; otherwise, "it will fail to be attentive to the Word of God that has been entrusted to it."<sup>59</sup> There are elements of truth and goodness in the world that can be a preparation for the gospel. These elements can serve to challenge and even change perceptions, practices and understandings within the church which obscure its understanding and living of the gospel.

D'Costa's theology thus provides a pneumatological rationale to the FABC's contention, a point which appears to be implied in the FABC's thinking. In this regard, the FABC acknowledges that dialogue with others "will reveal what the Spirit has taught others [other religions] to express in a marvellous variety of ways" and "through them we too may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father."<sup>60</sup> In this passage, one finds the only FABC-reference to the Spirit in relation to the issue of mutual enrichment. This is a point which D'Costa develops more in-depth in his theology of religions. It seems to me that the Asian bishops would have no difficulty in affirming with D'Costa that the church fulfils and is fulfilled, enriches and is enriched, as the church listens to the Spirit in the different voices of the religious other.

Indeed, this turn to the Spirit offers a path which Christians and churches could take and discover in the process the richness of the gifts of the Spirit in the world, particularly in the religious other.

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<sup>59</sup>D'Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions*, 114.

<sup>60</sup>FABC II, 35, FAPA I, 35.