

INCULTURATION IN ASIA:
THE CONTINUATION AND CONFLICT IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AFTER
THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

by

CHIH-YIN CHEN

(Under the Direction of WILLIAM L. POWER)

ABSTRACT

Throughout this thesis, I would like to discuss how the concept of inculturation is applied in the Catholic Church, especially focusing on the situation in Asia after the Second Vatican Council. The main perspectives I choose to compare and contrast are those of John Paul II in his official documents, especially his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, and those of Asian bishops, especially statements in Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). I would like to demonstrate how inculturation becomes both a possibility and a problem to the Catholic Church and how the theologians give their critiques that the Catholic Church must face.

INDEX WORDS: Inculturation, the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II, FABC, *Ecclesia in Asia*

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity has long been considered as a “foreign” religion among Asians, which ironically contrasts the fact that it originated from the Jewish people, the people of Asia.¹ Being a “Cradle” Catholic born in Taiwan, I am well aware of this phenomenon and especially concerned about this tension between ordinary Taiwanese people and the Christian missions. This tension is also admitted by Vatican itself: “Asia as a whole may well still appear unaffected by the message of Christ, but is that not chiefly because Christianity is still perceived there as a foreign religion introduced by Westerners, which has not been sufficiently adapted, thought through and lived in the cultures of Asia?”² Here the conflicts and compromises raised from the encounter of two (or more) different cultures are always “historically present;” nevertheless, new situations propel the Roman Catholic Church, the age-old and largest Christian community, to focus much more on the issue of faith and culture.

Among these situations, first of all, it is the development of communication technology and the great amount of information exchange that bring a “cultural conscientization,” a term used by

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* (Vatican City: November 6, 1999), No. 19.
<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html>.

² Pontifical Council for Culture, *Toward a Pastoral Approach to Culture* (Vatican city: May 23, 1999), No. 20.
<http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_pc-cultr_doc_03061999_pastoral_en.html>.

Hervé Carrier, to express “the rise of culture to prominence.”³ Culture, once having been implicitly incorporated in the lifestyle and way of thinking among the elites, is reconsidered as “anthropological reality” with social and historical meaning.⁴ It is precisely the modern culture—or the cultures—that the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), the decisive turning point of the Roman Catholic Church in the 20th century, wants to deal with. In *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), one of the four Constitutions of the Vatican II documents, the Catholic Church took a serious concern about culture, including issues on the dialogues among cultures, the influence of modern culture and man’s identity, the balance between new cultures and traditions, and finally the relation between culture and faith.⁵ “Aggiornamento,” the “updating” or modernization of the Catholic Church mentioned by Pope John XXIII, who convened the Second Vatican Council, in fact signified a cultural innovation of the Church in Vatican II rather than a doctrinal one.

Second, the awareness of local cultural characteristics and recovery from Western colonization, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, accentuate the need and desire for religious expressions to fit in each culture, whether theologically, liturgically, or spiritually. The universality of Christianity has always been spelled out, but “*the official expression of the Gospel*

³ Hervé Carrier, *Gospel Message and Human Cultures: From Leo XIII to John Paul II*, trans. by John Drury (PA.: Duquesne University Press, 1989), ix-x.

⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican City: December 7, 1965), No. 56.

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html>.

has been bound to central-southern European culture since the start of the modern period” within the Catholic Church.⁶ Especially when combining with the oppression of colonialism, Christianity did not root into the heart of the faithful, and hardly made the command “to have all nations the disciples of Jesus” possible (Mt. 28:19). Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, mentioned how those abrasive attempts to implant Christianity in its European-cultural form made no sense to people in different cultures, how these attempts were oppressive in nature, and how the underlying ideology implied a classical notion of only one culture that is “universal and permanent.”⁷ Examples as such can be as old as the argument of ancestor rituals in China and as new as the suspicion about utilizing Yoga as one way of meditation. Once again the resonance of such situations could be heard in *Gaudium et Spes*:

...the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.”⁸

There are two key phrases to notice in this quotation: “*the signs of the time*” and “*language intelligent to each generation.*” The former indicates the first phase—that the world steps into a brand new age with its emphasis on a cultural awakening; the latter indicates that the cultural awakening is diversified and localized, and the Catholic Church must appropriate itself to “make

⁶ Wilfred LaCroix, S.J., “Inculturation, Signs of the Times, and the Rapidly Changing Culture,” *Catholicism at the Millennium: The Church of Tradition in Transition*, ed. by Gerald L. Miller and Wilburn T. Stancil (Kansas City, MO.: Rockhurst University Press, 2001), 81.

⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, *Models of contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002) 9-11.

⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 4.

it intelligible.” Certainly this is the background against which the Catholic Church starts to discuss the concept and the application of “**inculturation**.” I shall trace the origin and development of that term and discern it from other related terms in the following pages.

Peter Schineller, S.J., discussed in *A Handbook on Inculturation* the inadequacy of words when considering the relations between faith and culture. These inadequate words present both theoretical and practical problems if faith is carried out with a limited cultural scope. For example, “imposition” underlies an oppressive attitude and the danger to perceive Christianity as a “finished product, or package” that can no longer accept something new. “Translation” is considered as a necessary start point of a cultural exchange, but it can never breed a fruitful understanding if it is the only method. The third word he mentioned, “adaptation,” is a little trickier. It implies an openness to the new circumstances, but this openness is not the appreciation of the new but a reluctant yet inevitable action that must be taken.⁹

The more adequate words, then, are words referring more to a situation in accordance with the time and the place, such as “indigenization” and “contextualization.” The former seems to stress the leadership of indigenous people along with the development suitable for local perspective. The latter suggests creative ideas and practices in each particular context in order to response to the particular ministerial and theological need. A third and even more powerful word

⁹ Peter Schineller, S.J., *A Handbook on Inculturation* (Mahwah, NY.: Paulist Press, 1990), 14-17.

is “incarnation.” This word also appeared in *Ad Gentes* (*Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church*), one of the Vatican II documents:

In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.¹⁰

Though the council itself did not pin down the word “inculturation,” the description here clearly demonstrate how the Catholic Church conceived it in the council—“the imitation of Christ’s incarnation.”¹¹ Following the above, “the incarnate nature of Christianity” and “the sacramental nature of reality” refer to the revelation and the understanding of it as alive and concrete—in the cultural contexts.¹²

What is inculturation, then? In *Toward A Theology of Inculturation*, one of the most important resource books in regard to this issue, gave a short definition as such: “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures...it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.”¹³ Another definition, given by Marcello de C. Azevedo, referred even more clearly that inculturation is

¹⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Ad Gentes* (Vatican City: December 7, 1965), No. 22.
<http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html>.

¹¹ *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 21.

¹² *Models of contextual Theology*, 12-13.

¹³ Aylward Shorter, *Toward A Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1989), 11.

...a process of evangelization by which the Christian life and message are assimilated by a culture in such a way that not only are this life and message expressed through the elements proper to this culture, but they come to constitute a principle of inspiration as well, and eventually a norm and power of unification that transforms, re-creates, and revitalizes that culture.¹⁴

As already shown previously, the word was not used in Vatican II documents but the spirit of it could be observed in many passages. Though the first time this word was used in the Catholic Church can not be pinpointed, the extensive application may well attribute to the Society of Jesus. As early as 1978, Fr. Pedro Arrupe (the General of Jesuits at the time) defined inculturation as “the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context...transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation.’”¹⁵ Later in 1979, Pope John Paul II mentioned this “neologism” in *Catechesi Tradendae*, which was the first time the word “inculturation” appeared in papal papers. Since then the issue of inculturation has been discussed over and over, especially regarding Catholic missions.¹⁶ On the other hand, the Asian bishops were also among the earliest to promote the practice of inculturation. The first reference to “inculturation” in the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) came to scene in 1970, the final statement of the 1970 Asian Bishops’ Meeting.¹⁷

¹⁴ Marcello de C. Azevedo, “Inculturation,” *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. by René Latourelle & Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 501.

¹⁵ Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation,” *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses of Pedro Arrupe, S.J.*, ed. by J. Aixala (St. Louis: 1981), 172-81.

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Vatican City: October 16, 1979), No. 53.
<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html>.

¹⁷ Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan, “Inculturation in Asia: The Asian Approach of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC),” *Rooting Faith in Asia: Source Book for Inculturation*, ed. by Fr. Mario Saturnino Dias (India:

The idea of inculturation presented here is somewhat closely related to the term “acculturation,” which is used by anthropologists to designate the contact between two cultures and the consequences from it. The difference that the Catholic Church wants to stress is that the encounter between faith and culture is not merely the encounter of two cultures because “the Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures.”¹⁸ Yet “the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.”¹⁹ The attitude that faith is distinctively different from any culture is, in the mean time, challenged by a realistic situation; that is, the Christian faith can never exist except in a cultural form.²⁰

The starting point of this thesis originates from this contradictory situation that I found within the Catholic Church. In the following chapters, I would like to examine first in chapter 1, those important announcements in the Vatican II documents, which set up the base of how the Catholic Church handles the issue of culture. Then I would like to focus on “inculturation in Asia,” in which I would like to explicate John Paul II’s and the Asian bishops’ discourses respectively, in chapter 2 and 3. Finally, I would like to demonstrate the critical points of the

Claretian Publications, 2005), 255.

¹⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Vatican City: December 8, 1975), No. 20.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Toward A Theology of Inculturation*, 12.

theologians and how Asian inculturation continues and discontinues since Vatican II. The main problems that I attempt to probe include: (1) What are the important messages revealed from Vatican II documents concerning inculturation? (2) As a pope who concerns the dialogues between religions and cultures, what is the attitude of John Paul II on the issue of inculturation, and what is his specific instruction or suggestion to the church of Asia? (3) What is the effort that the Asian bishops have made since the foundation of FABC? What is their idea of inculturation in Asia? What are the differences between FABC and papal documents? (4) What critiques have been given from the theologians about the issue, and what are the possible ways to release tension between the local churches in Asia and the power-center of the Catholic Church (the Pope)?

As both a historical and theological review, the issue here is still a developing one. The classical definition of theology is “faith seeking understanding,” in which I boldly realize in today’s situation as “faith seeking living.” A living reality is exactly what the Catholic Church needs to face, and reviewing the discourses in the past may well be part of the task that the Catholic Church needs to undertake in order to stand in the ever-changing world.

CHAPTER 1

VATICAN II AND INCULTURATION

There is something worth noticing before discussing Vatican II documents related to inculturation; that is, inculturation has always been a phenomenon within Christianity since it is “the process of evangelization.” Schineller listed several milestones considering inculturation in the Catholic Church: the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), Christianity and Greek philosophy in the early centuries, Matteo Ricci in China, and Vatican II. But he also listed the oversights or withdrawals of the Catholic Church in its long history: the missions during the fifteenth to seventeenth century, the Council of Trent, and the First Vatican Council.²¹ Throughout its history, the Catholic Church has always been coping with the issue and, by fits and starts, taking an open attitude. The complexity of the issue lies in the identity of the church as a community (organizational concern), the identity of being the people of God (religious concern), and the identity of her original Greco-Roman form (cultural concern).

Carl Rahner, one of the most famous theologians in the Catholic Church during the twentieth century, discussed the meaning of Vatican II in his monumental literary work

²¹ *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 28-39.

Theological Investigations, in which he divided church history into three epochs.²² The first epoch was a rather short time, from the preaching of Jesus to his disciples' preaching among the Jews. The second epoch was a long period of almost two thousand years, from the mission of Paul to the Gentiles until Vatican II. Paul first adapted the gospel messages to cultures other than the Jewish one, and the whole of church history was then predominantly Western European culture. The third epoch started with Vatican II, a council that could be really called a "Catholic" council with more than two thousand bishops from all over the world. Rahner's method of periodization is obviously a cultural one. In no doubt, Vatican II is the furthest step among those opportunities in church history, which probably can affirm the statement that Vatican II is a revival of the Catholic Church on the movement of inculturation. There are sixteen documents issued from Vatican II, including four Constitutions, three Declarations, and nine Decrees. In this chapter I would provide an overview of these Vatican documents essential to inculturation: *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, LG), *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, SC), *Ad Gentes* (AD), and *Nostra Aetate* (*Declaration on Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, NA).²³

²² Karl Rahner, "A Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 20, trans. by Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 77-89.

²³ All the Vatican II documents come from the official website:
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/. I would no longer list out the exact links.

A Shift From Enmity to Admiration

Unlike the antagonism of the First Vatican Council toward modern culture, Vatican II gave high credit to the contribution of culture. *Gaudium et Spes* started its discussion on faith and culture with an narration of the phenomenon that human beings had achieved a height in cultural development through various tools and sciences, and truly these achievements also provided a chance for mankind to admire “the particular aspects of the different civilizations” and to promote “the unity of human race” at the same time.²⁴ Beside of its appreciation of man’s cultural progress, Vatican II also paid attention to what was considered to be the good and the true in different local cultures. The cultures or the religions which had once been “pagan” or “heretic,” were then re-evaluated and taken seriously. *Nostra Aetate* affirmed that religions among different races recognized the divine, though in different ways and degrees, and the cultures among them also devoted themselves to answer the ultimate questions of mankind, as the Catholic Church herself did through centuries. The Catholic Church not only “rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions,” but also tries to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.”²⁵

Another important document, *Lumen Gentium*, when discussing how different cultures and religions relate to the people of God, admitted the solidarity of human beings and the universality

²⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 54.

²⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate* (Vatican City: October 28, 1965), No. 2.

of salvation, and thus “whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel.”²⁶ In this way, the Catholic Church presents an unprecedented admiration toward non-Christian religions or cultures, albeit in her scheme of interpretation. The Church even goes further to suggest that in establishing kingdom of God, the temporal welfare of any people is not taken away; on the contrary, the people of God “fosters and takes to itself, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches and customs in which the genius of each people expresses itself.”²⁷ Azevedo commented on this position of the Church in Vatican II as “a church-in-relation, a church ready for dialogue and open to the diversity of the quest for God by human beings and to the multiple concretization of this effort.”²⁸

Nevertheless, it is faintly visible that the Catholic Church is cautious when taking concrete actions. In the following passages related to the practical involvement of the believers to the cultural events, Vatican II documents give a flexible yet prudent plan.

Interaction of Faith and Culture

With the attitude of admiration, Vatican II mentioned that the virtues in different cultures enriched the content of belief. The parable in *Ad Gentes* that the Word of God is the seed, and it

²⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* (Vatican City: November 21, 1964), No. 16.

²⁷ Ibid, No. 13.

²⁸ “Inculturation,” *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 504.

grows on the land of each different culture with the nourishment from its wisdom and goodness, especially indicates a confidence in the influence of local cultures.²⁹ In *Gaudium et Spes*, this parable even extends to the cultivation of man's agricultural work, which equals to the devotion of those artists, scientists, philosophers or historians. Their fruitful accomplishment "can do very much to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness and beauty, and to the formation of considered opinions which have universal value."³⁰ Hence, the endeavor of improvement of culture is regarded as the endeavor of cooperation with God because man is apt to accept the word of God under such cultural enlightenment, as "the true light which enlightens every man" (Jn. 1:9-10).³¹

This is not to say, that Christian faith is no longer needed, because the Word of God "purifies, strengthens, elevates and ennobles" those cultural elements.³² It reinvigorates man's culture, combats the sin and immorality of man, and leads people to inner liberty.³³ In order to effectively fulfill the mission of the Church and this purification/elevation of faith toward cultures, *Ad Gentes* wrote distinctively that new approaches and studies in theology had to be made.

²⁹ *Ad Gentes*, No. 22.

³⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 57.

³¹ *Ibid.* It surprisingly implies that, the light of Christ prevails in different cultures even before his birth and even before those peoples accept Christian faith.

³² *Lumen Gentium*, No. 13.

³³ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 58.

...it is necessary that in each major socio-cultural area such theological speculation should be encouraged, in the light of the universal Church's tradition, as may submit to a new scrutiny the words and deeds which God has revealed, and which have been set down in Sacred Scripture and explained by the Fathers and by the magisterium.

Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith may seek for understanding, with due regard for the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples; it will be seen in what ways their customs, views on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. From here the way will be opened to a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life.³⁴

This methodology of seeking common ground while reserving differences seems to lay out “an ecclesiology of cultural pluriformity,” which provides for setting up inculturation theology.³⁵

With this characteristic of dynamic creativity and the confidence of natural reason (wisdom in different cultures), Vatican II held an optimistic view on the interaction between faith and culture(s): “Christian life will be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture. Particular traditions, together with the peculiar patrimony of each family of nations, illumined by the light of the Gospel, can then be taken up into Catholic unity.”³⁶

Liturgy Renewal

Regarding the concrete actions, the first important thing is probably the renewal of liturgy. In the Catholic Church, liturgy occupies a central status and is the climax of daily religious life. The desperate need to address daily pastoral questions in a church's life can be observed by the fact

³⁴ *Ad Gentes*, No. 22.

³⁵ *Toward A Theology of Inculturation*, 198-99.

³⁶ *Ad Gentes*, No. 22.

that the document on Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) was the first conciliar document to be approved and promulgated (in 1963). The key instructions are from No. 37-40, under the subtitle “Norms for Adapting the Liturgy to the Culture and Traditions of Peoples.” In these passages, “adaptations” were welcomed under different circumstances, in different respects, including the revision of the liturgical books.³⁷ The use of vernacular was extended to the readings and prayers.³⁸ Meanwhile the use of traditional music of each people should have its own place in order to make the liturgy suitable to each culture.³⁹ Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., concluded that the Catholic experience of worship had changed theologically and practically since Vatican II. Theologically, the emphasis on the Mass shifted from a sacrifice to a communal worship of the entire Church (though not without the propitiatory sense). Practically, the ritual “has helped make the meaning of the liturgy more accessible to people.”⁴⁰ A respect for different races, cultures, and individual situations (as in the “mission lands”) is quite apparent in the phrasing of this document.

However, it does not say that the practice of liturgy fully embraces the principles of inculturation. Aylward Shorter observed that this document does not go as far as other documents

³⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Vatican City: December 4, 1963), No. 38.

³⁸ Ibid, No. 36.

³⁹ Ibid, No. 119.

⁴⁰ Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., *Reconciling Faith and Reason: Apologists, Evangelists, and Theologians in a Divided Church* (Collegeville, MI.: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 97.

I discussed in the previous passages.⁴¹ The “adaptation” of the liturgy (as I discussed in the introduction, a word that indicates a reluctant or standpat attitude) is limited, not to be undertaken without the approval of the authority and not to change “the substantial unity of the Roman rite.”⁴² Since it is the first document approved, unfortunately it lacks some refreshing thinking appearing later on in *Lumen Gentium*, *Guadium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes*.

Social Participation

One phase of inculturation presented in *Guadium et Spes* is the emphasis on social participation of the believers. It is true that for Christian belief to be rooted in different cultures, the social participation certainly is the duty of believers. In addition, the Catholic Church had always posed as the teacher of man’s societies; yet in this document, the attitude is more of a servant than of an instructor.⁴³ The service of Christians has a twofold responsibility: on one hand, it commits to build a kingdom on earth “as in heaven;” on the other hand, it echoes a faith worth living in its specific cultural form. This effort is comprehensive in all major fields of a social life:⁴⁴

- (1) In the field of education, the church members have to improve the availability of cultural education, especially in families and public activities. (GS 61)

⁴¹ *Toward A Theology of Inculturation*, 191.

⁴² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 38.

⁴³ Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: Before and After Vatican II 1878-1993* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), 85.

⁴⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 61-86.

- (2) In the field of art, the contributions of the artists should be recognized by the Church in order to achieve “friendly relationships” between believers and artists. Various forms of art in local traditions may be utilized in the building of sanctuary. (GS 62)
- (3) In the field of science, the view that science was the enemy of faith is abandoned, for believers should understand the pulsation of the world in order not to “neglect close contact with its own time,” especially in the affairs of theological inquiry and the formation of priests as well as laity. (GS 62)
- (4) In the field of economic life, social justice, social relief and the balance of economic power is regarded as of primary importance. Advocating for the poor and the needed, the Catholic Church considers her works being works of charity as well as of humanity. (GS 63-72)
- (5) In the field of political life, encouragement of participation in political life is made, and the issues of world peace and cooperation are specifically proposed. Meanwhile, the relation between church and state is acknowledged as “distinct” but necessary to cooperate in order to serve the society, though the church utilizes means that “in a great many respects differ from the means proper to the earthly city.” (GS 76, 77-86)

The accent on social participation, later on, would continue to be an important focus while inculturation is considered in different areas. A local, social participation reminds the Church of more needs that wait to be fulfilled at different levels. In fact, it becomes witness of Christian belief, even in those regions where the Gospel can not be explicitly proclaimed.⁴⁵ The commitment of justice strikes a chord with the people especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Evangelization and Culture

Not only the religious life of the faithful intimately relates to the development of culture, the evangelization—the mission of the believers—can not be done without the cultural dimension. *Ad Gentes* exactly pointed out the important principles when considering mission, especially in the “mission lands.” As quoted in the Introduction, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is taken as the paradigm of missionary activity in this document.⁴⁶ Various actions are suggested to be taken in a way of “inculturated” mission:⁴⁷

- (1) The laity is encouraged to be familiar with their traditional thoughts, in order to express faith in an adequate way, both in words and deeds. It is impossible to have

⁴⁵ *Ad Gentes*, No. 12. “Closely united with men in their life and work, Christ's disciples hope to render to others true witness of Christ and to work for their salvation, even where they are not able to announce Christ fully.”

⁴⁶ *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 41.

⁴⁷ *Ad Gentes*, No. 11-18, under the subtitle “Chapter 2: Mission Work Itself.”

fruitful evangelization without “sincere and patient dialogue” of the laity with the people they contact with. (AG 11)

- (2) The congregation of the faithful must be supported by its own culture, and all kinds of associations and groups should be organized in order to affect the whole society, since mission works should never belong only to a personal level, but a communal one. (AG 15)
- (3) True patriotism without radical prejudice and hypernationalism is worth cultivated since a good believer may also be a good citizen. (AG 15)
- (4) The formation of the priests contains the learning of church history, especially the background that is related to the specific situation in their own countries, the relationship between Christianity and their own cultures, and the current needs of the society. They are encouraged to find out the links between the traditional inheritance and Christianity in the field of philosophy and theology. (AG 16)
- (5) Religious orders should reflect on how to express and hand down their abundant spiritual treasures according to the nature and quality of different peoples. It is also their tasks to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions of different cultures into their religious life. (AG 18)

After reviewing these important instructions in *Ad Gentes*, it follows a rational line about which Schineller commented as such: “This document is indispensable for the study of inculturation, since it brings together the best of recent papal teaching on the meaning and methods of missionary activity.”⁴⁸

Overall Significance

The Catholic Church reflects her situation in today’s world and replies thoroughly in every way: at the organizational level, the Church invites her members to cooperate with today’s society and work with different peoples; at the religious level, she encourages liturgies and spiritualities that are compatible with different cultures; at the cultural level, she asks for evangelization which takes the local characteristics into account. As “a tentative approach by the church to the discovery and official realization of itself as world-Church,”⁴⁹ Vatican II is the first awareness (not sub-consciousness) of the Catholic Church about her limitations in her western-European cultural form and about her need to reform. Though many of the documents still originate from a Western mentality, the effort has been made by bishops who were representatives of different local churches. Rahner pointed out one noteworthy phenomenon that “an effort has been made in these decrees to produce statements that are not much affected by the linguistic style of a

⁴⁸ *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 41.

⁴⁹ “A Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” 78.

neoscholastic theology.” The documents are prepared in such a way that can be “intelligible” to the world, especially compared with the drafts which had been prepared in Rome before the council.⁵⁰

Yet in this critical moment of transition that Rahner took to be as important as the transition which Paul contributed, in order that Judaeo-Christianity might be transplanted in the Gentiles’ world, many questions are raised. In realizing the urgency of reforming the Church and making it intelligible to different peoples by adapting local characteristics, what is the new center of its unity? In acknowledging the cultural and religious virtues among different peoples, how far can Christians’ proclamation of Jesus be stretched out? And what is the uniqueness and meaning of being a Christian? As the questions I discussed in “Liturgy Renewal,” the liturgy itself, though incorporating the use of vernacular, which is not a superfluous change, maintains mostly its Roman rites. Even among the Vatican documents we can see the disagreement in pace between *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and other documents. In the following chapters about John Paul II and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) on inculturation, continuing conflicts may be seen in wrestling with these questions.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 81.

CHAPTER 2

POPE JOHN PAUL II AND INCULTURATION IN ASIA

As the pope who first mentioned “inculturation” in papal documents, Pope John Paul II continued the leavening after-effect of Vatican II. No doubt he had made more pastoral journeys than any other pope in history, and his numerous teachings upon pastoral affairs were far more than his predecessors, too. He was the first non-Italian pope since the sixteenth century, which more or less symbolized an era of the transition away from a Rome-centered church. Paul VI and his successor John Paul I both died in 1978 and left the Church after Vatican II to the hands of John Paul II. Thus by observing his teaching and practice, we can reflect in a reasonable sense on how the authority of the Catholic Church directs itself after Vatican II’s great leap. Some important events related to the movement of inculturation during John Paul II’s pontificate should be reviewed here before entering the specific topic on inculturation in Asia.

For as long as John Paul II is discussed, few would ignore his pastoral journeys all over the world since his inauguration. He had been to Mexico, Poland, Ireland, and United States in 1979; then Hungary, Africa, France, Brazil, and West Germany in 1980. His first Asian trip was in 1981, a course through Pakistan, the Philippines, Guam and Japan. Even after the attempted assassination in the fall of 1981, which had brought him to the brink of death, he visited Britain

and Argentina in 1982, the two of whom were fighting against each other at that time over the issue of Falklands. In his late years, though suffering Parkinson's, he paid a visit to the Holy Land in the Jubilee year of 2000. Before this trip, he begged pardon for the sins that the Catholic Church had made in her long history, including the injustice against Jews and Muslims.⁵¹

Azevedo pointed out that the

...repercussions of these journeys on an interaction between the pope and the respective episcopates is of genuine importance. The mass of data, together with the development of new ecclesial perceptions flowing from an enhanced appreciation of collegiality and of the local churches, has rendered the inculturation perspective imperative...⁵²

Along with those travels, John Paul II canonized a huge amount of local saints in his papacy, "to demonstrate to the world the heroic sanctity that could be achieved by the faithful in every quarter of the globe."⁵³

In 1982, John Paul II established a Pontifical Council for Culture. Its task was to promote the encounter of the Gospel and culture, to foster dialogue between the Church and non-believers, to coordinate bishops and the Holy See in the affairs of faith and cultures, and to coordinate different academic organizations inside and outside of the Church.⁵⁴ The members were from

⁵¹ John Cornwell, *The Pontiff in Winter: Triumph and Conflict in the Reign of John Paul II* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 96.

⁵² "Inculturation," *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 505.

⁵³ *The Pontiff in Winter*, 110. John Cornwell mentioned that "John Paul had presided over the making of almost a thousand saints and blessed, more than the number of those canonized and beatified by all the popes put together since Pope Urban VIII started the formal process in the 1620s."

⁵⁴ The Pontifical Council for Culture, "Profile" (Vatican City: July 19), 2005.

<http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_pro_06061999_en.html>.

different countries, with both lay people and clergy. The council gave the Pope advice on the question of culture and hence the question of inculturation.⁵⁵

In 1985, twenty years after Vatican II, an Extraordinary Synod was called to celebrate the anniversary of Vatican II and to implement its fruits. There was a higher percentage of non-western representatives in this Synod (though a much smaller group compared to Vatican II),⁵⁶ which probably contributed to the comment made by Henri Teissier, that this Synod did not pay attention to the issues in Vatican II to a full-scale; rather certain topics dominated the discussions. Among them the most decisive motif was “*the relations between individual churches and Rome.*”⁵⁷ Focusing on this motif, the issue of inculturation also occupied a great significance. In “The Final Report” of the Synod, the suggestions for the Church’s mission were:

- (a) the theology of the cross and the Pascal mystery in preaching, the sacraments, and the life of the Church of our day;
- (b) **the theory and practice of inculturation**, as well as the dialogue with non-Christian religions and with nonbelievers;
- (c) the preferential option for the poor; and

⁵⁵ A *Handbook on Inculturation*, 44.

⁵⁶ Jan Kerkhofs, “The Members of the Synod,” trans. by Robert Nowell, *Synod 1985—An Evaluation*, ed. by Giuseppe Alberigo and James Provost (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark Ltd., 1986), 51. The bishops represented in the synod were 27.9% from Western countries, and 72.0% from Non-Western countries. The Total Synod members were 36.3% from Western countries and 63.6% from non-Western Countries. As to the percentages of the Bishops invited in Vatican II, they were about half and half, respectively.

⁵⁷ Henri Teissier, “Bishops’ Conferences and Their Function in the Church,” trans. by J. G. Cumming, *Synod 1985—An Evaluation*, ed. by Giuseppe Alberigo and James Provost (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark Ltd., 1986), 110.

(d) the social doctrine of the Church as it relates to human promotion in ever-new situations.⁵⁸

Finally, the five continental Synods of bishops were convened as the preparation of Jubilee year under John Paul II's instruction. The African Synod was opened in 1994, the American Synod in 1997, the Asian and Oceanian Synods in 1998, and the European in 1999. These continental Synods started since Pope Paul VI, but the Asian Synod in 1998 was in a particularly grand manner because it was the first time that the bishops of the three main areas came together: the Near and Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and Central Asia and the Far East.⁵⁹ John Paul II's synthesis of the Asian Synod, combined with his past teachings, the Synod's official documents, the reports of group discussions, the intervention of synodal participants, and the final list of propositions, promulgated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* after the Synod, was mainly my source to investigate his idea of inculturation in Asia.

Ecclesia in Asia

The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (*Church in Asia*) was given after the Asian Synod in November of 1999. This long paper, especially addressed to the bishops in Asia, though with

⁵⁸ "The Final Report," *Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1985* (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic conference, Inc., 1986), 24. (Boldface added by the author)

⁵⁹ Peter C. Phan, "Introduction," *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 1.

repetitive themes that John Paul II had been always stressing, was itself a comprehensive observation of the Asian Catholic Church and an announcement and approval of the fruitful results in the Synod. By the exhortation, the years and the effort that the Asian bishops spent on pastoral labors were made known to the universal Church. In the introduction and the first chapter of *Ecclesia in Asia*, John Paul II noted the background of Asian Christianity and the difficulty of the local Catholic churches. On one hand, Lord Jesus Christ was an Asian: his life and death was on the Holy Land; his cultural background was Jewish, and also, Asian. The Asian religious and cultural values, such as ‘love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry,’ along with “a highly developed sense of community” and “their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence” were respectful, and they offered great opportunities for the church members to explore while also communicating the message of the Gospel in a way “faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul.”⁶⁰

On the other hand, the abundant cultural heritage constituted a challenge, especially to evangelization because “religious systems such as Buddhism or Hinduism have a clearly soteriological character.”⁶¹ Meanwhile, it was “the scandal of Christianity” to accept that “the

⁶⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 6. John Paul II had it in mind that the sense of “being as Asian” is compatible with being a Christian, under the framework of “complementary and harmony,” a style that was authentic Asian.

⁶¹ Ibid, No. 2, cf. Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, (Vatican City, October 11, 1994), No. 38. <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_10111994_tertio-millennio-adveniente_en.html>.

all-holy, all-powerful and all-knowing God took upon himself our human nature and endured suffering and death to win salvation for all people.”⁶² Despite this challenge, John Paul II still emphasized that it was needed to proclaim Jesus Christ, a gift to Asian people and people all over the world, in whom they found “their deepest questions answered, their hopes fulfilled, their dignity uplifted and their despair conquered,” and they were joined together into God the Father’s love.⁶³ John Paul II devoted a whole chapter (chapter 2) on reviewing who Jesus is and the significance of his life as fully humane, as fully compassionate, as fully loving by accepting his death, which “not only restored communion between God and humanity” but also “established a new communion between human beings alienated from one another because of sin.”⁶⁴

He acknowledged the contribution of the Asian bishops when they meditated this mystery of Christ and realized it as “the ultimate source of hope and strength for the people of Asia in their struggles and uncertainties.”⁶⁵ However, he also mentioned a danger that concerned the synodal Fathers: a tendency to separate the activity of the Holy Spirit from that of Jesus Christ. In chapter 3, he discussed the function and the role of the Holy Spirit and quoted his stance in another Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*:

⁶² Ibid, No. 12.

⁶³ Ibid, No. 14.

⁶⁴ Ibid, No. 13.

⁶⁵ Ibid, No. 12.

This is the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ...⁶⁶

Apparently, John Paul II was referring to a problem after Vatican II's interpretation of the wisdom among different peoples. Vatican II recognized that the Holy Spirit worked not only in the Catholic Church but also in different Christian denominations and even in the non-Christian religions and cultures. Yet it is not to say that the Church is excused from proclaiming Jesus, as if the salvation plan of God has been fulfilled in this work of the Holy Spirit, though indeed, "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God."⁶⁷

The question is: how can the Church of Asia achieve its mission? As mentioned above, the traditional heritage of Asian people already points out several soteriological systems. In addition, it is difficult to proclaim Jesus Christ as "the only Savior." The situation was expressed in the Synod as such: "Some of the followers of the great religions of Asia have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine or the Absolute, or as an 'enlightened one.' But it is difficult for them to see Him as the **only** manifestation of the Divine."⁶⁸ With the synodal

⁶⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Vatican City: December 7, 1990), No. 29.
<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html>.

⁶⁷ Ibid, No. 28.

⁶⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 20 (Bold face added by the author).

Fathers, John Paul II understood the immensity and the hardship of the task to enable Asian people to identify with Jesus, while “remaining faithful both to the Church’s theological doctrine and to their own Asian origins,”⁶⁹ not to mention the negative influence of the missionaries with their cultural bias in the church history, which inevitably alienate the message of Gospel to Asian cultures. Thus in chapter 4, John Paul II spent quite a few passages discussing the inescapable issue of evangelization—inculturation.

Inculturation in *Ecclesia in Asia*

The urgency of inculturation in Asia not only stems from this cultural gap in a negative sense, but also from a hope of a positive interaction between faith and culture, which is also Vatican II’s appeal.⁷⁰ For bridging the cultural gap, John Paul II mentioned several principles that were provided from the results of the Synod, which can be briefly generalized into two aspects according to my observation: **rational** and **experiential**, or emotional. The former aspect concerns about the habitual use of the narrative method in an Asian philosophical tradition. Asian people feel more familiar and intimate with “stories, parables and symbols,” like the life of Jesus in the four gospels, rather than systematic doctrines.⁷¹ This pedagogy is supposed to be

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, No. 21. “In the process of encountering the world’s different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them.” Cf. *Guadium et Spes*, No. 58; *Ad Gentes*, No. 22.

⁷¹ Ibid, No. 20.

presented in a gradual progress. For those who have never heard about Jesus (the initial proclamation), “the presentation of Jesus Christ could come as the fulfillment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples.”⁷² Later on, the ontological notions, more relational, historical or even cosmic perspective can be used to complement that proclamation.

As to the second aspect, the pedagogy tends to be “evocative,” relating faith to the emotional experience and appealing to the sensibilities of the Asian people. This requires the evangelizers to notice the situation of the listeners and to express the teaching in adequate languages. Some images of Jesus Christ are especially recommended by synodal Fathers, as John Paul II quoted: “the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One.”⁷³ It is noteworthy that John Paul II did not forget to supplement the image of the Saviour, “who can provide meaning to those undergoing unexplainable pain and suffering.”

These two aspects are not new paths but a direction worked for many years since the foundation of FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences). Their opinions, by John Paul

⁷² Ibid. This idea was quoted by John Paul II from “Relatio post disceptationem,” a document synthesized from 191 interventions in the Synod for final group discussions. It was considered “premature” and “express more the concerns of the Roman curia,” in Peter C. Phan’s judgement, and was not published.

⁷³ Ibid, cf. “The Synod’s Propositions,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 142.

II's exhortation, finally can be made known to the universal church.⁷⁴ The goal of these ways of inculturation is to build the Church **of** *Asia* rather than just Church **in** *Asia* and to fulfill the need of the dialogue with Asian cultures.⁷⁵ More achievements and works of FABC will be discussed in chapter 3.

For a positive interaction with cultures, John Paul II brought up five areas that must be worked on: “theological reflection, liturgy, the formation of priests and religious, catechesis and spirituality.”⁷⁶ The first area mentioned is **theology**, where the “work of developing an inculturated theology, especially in the area of Christology” is encouraged.⁷⁷ This could be sensed in the previous passage suggesting that the Synodal Fathers try to present different faces of Jesus Christ to the Asian people. The effort made by FABC will be explicated in chapter 3, and more John Paul II's opinions will be discussed in the next passage, where I shall present his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* as a supplement.

The second area is **liturgy**, “the source and summit of all Christian life and mission,” where “a wise and effective use of elements drawn from the local cultures” should be applied without ignoring the needs of minorities (the youth, the poor, the old and women...etc.). An important reminder was made by John Paul II that Asian episcopates must cooperate with the

⁷⁴ Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 174.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 174, 179.

⁷⁶ *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 21, cf. “The Synod's Propositions,” 159.

⁷⁷ Ibid, No.22.

Roman Curia because liturgy in the life of the Catholic Church is considered to profess one faith of the whole church, and should not develop separately in local churches.⁷⁸

The third area is the **formation of evangelizers**. In addition to formational program and style suitable for Asian evangelizers, John Paul II made clear the importance for the seminarians to master traditional expressions in theology and philosophy meticulously, as well as a solid ground in biblical and patristic studies. Finally in the areas of catechesis and spirituality, the formation of the laity people and the religious were mentioned because the former plays the paramount role in the task of inculturation and the latter has the responsibility to converge different spiritual heritage, with a sensibility to religious and cultural commonness and differences. Meanwhile, John Paul II emphasized prayer and contemplation as a profound base of a living faith and the essence of mission works, which fortunately echoes an Asian preference for the contemplative and ascetic life.⁷⁹

The crucial element to carry out these tasks is **the Bible**. John Paul II referred to two aspects that were beneficial for proclaiming biblical messages.⁸⁰ First, written texts are important and respected in Asian culture, especially in “preserving and communicating religious experience.”

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, No. 23. “*Mission is contemplative action and active contemplation.*”

⁸⁰ Ibid, No. 22, cf. “The Synod’s Propositions,” 146; “*Relatio ante disceptationem*,” (“Presentation before the Discussion by the General Relator”), a presentation by Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-Hsi on April 19, summarized for discussion during the Synod. In this document, he said: “Asian peoples have great veneration for the sacred word and the sacred word has a special role in the transmission of their religious traditions. Their religious leaders are deeply transformed and shaped by their sacred texts.”

Second, a large amount of narratives in the Bible would be a familiar genre for Asian readers. Translations of the Bible in different vernaculars, pastorally oriented courses on the Bible, and the application of the Bible to the complex realities of Asian life were highlighted in this passage about the importance of popularizing the biblical message among the laity and the clergies, as well as followers of other religions.

Inculturation in *Fides et Ratio*

At this point I would like to insert some of the passages in *Fides et Ratio*, an encyclical issued in 1998, on which Peter C. Phan made a thorough study, connecting this encyclical with inculturation in Asia, specifically in the field of philosophy and theology. In this encyclical, John Paul II stressed on the collaboration of faith and reason, along with that of philosophy and theology. While faith seeks understanding, understanding seeks faith.⁸¹ Limited by the scope and focus of this thesis, I cannot explain too much about the interaction between faith and reason that John Paul II explicated in this encyclical, but a brief review of the points relevant to inculturation in Asia is necessary.

⁸¹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., "Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. by David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 11.

Phan observed six relevant sections in *Fides et Ratio* in No. 1, 3, 5, 72, 75, and 104. I try to divide their contents into three major points:

- (1) Eastern philosophy as the preparation of faith: John Paul II noticed how Eastern philosophy had common concerns with Christianity. In fact these were the main concerns in all cultures, in all times. *“Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?”* (No. 1) We met them in the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as in Greek philosophy, poetry and tragedies, in the Veda and the Avesta, in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, in the preaching of Buddha, and so on. The immense influence of philosophy appeared both in the West and in the East, since “every people has its own native and seminal wisdom, which...tends to find voice and develop in forms which are genuinely philosophical.” (No. 3) These native traditions of wisdom demonstrated the desire for truth and became sources of social regulations. Among these traditions, John Paul II put Indian tradition forward particularly, in which he appreciated a kind of “great spiritual impulse” that lead man to go beyond the restrictions of time and space and to pursue “the absolute.” (No. 72) *“Philosophy completely independent of the Gospel’s Revelation,”* that is, philosophy before the birth of redeemer Jesus Christ and philosophy in regions untouched by the Gospel,

is still open at least implicitly to “the supernatural” (No. 75) This had been discussed in Vatican II, and the Asian bishops also recognized this.

- (2) Philosophy as the occasion of dialogue and the tool for inculturation: it is true that no culture would be diminished in the encounter of faith. On the contrary, faith liberates culture from its shackles and errors. Meanwhile, faith would profit by these experiences of cultural dialogues, not only because it is enriched but also because it collects more clues about future dialogues with emerging human cultures. It is a “reciprocal process,” as is explicated in a footnote offered by Carrier: “The inculturation of the gospel and the evangelization of the culture are two complementary aspects of the one mission of evangelization.”⁸² Hence modern Christians (especially Indian Christians) are obliged to “draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith.” (No. 72) There is a need for the study in philosophy and theology to cooperate and develop “in the context of the inculturation of Christianity into the local culture.”⁸³ An occasion of “understanding and dialogues” with the non-believers is indispensable, especially in the global ethic affairs; philosophical discussions offered a platform. (No. 104)

⁸² Hervé Carrier, “Inculturation of the Gospel,” *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. by René Latourelle & Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 512.

⁸³ *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 60.

- (3) Warnings on the interaction between faith and culture: in the beginning of the encyclical, John Paul II mentioned the loss and mistakes in today's philosophy. These included "agnosticism and relativism," "an undifferentiated pluralism," which implied a lack of "confidence in truth." Some conceptions from the east, he said, were also trapped in this confusion, denying the "exclusive character" of truth.
- (No. 5) John Paul II also insisted that Christians should not give up their inheritance in the Church—the inculturated fruits from Greco-Roman world at the beginning. In addition, the requirements to remain one's cultural uniqueness and creativity did not equal to a self-contained attitude or opposition against other traditions. (No. 72)

Fides et Ratio is more general in its analysis on the issue of inculturation, but it is clear that, on the one hand, it seems to acknowledge the spirit of Vatican II—that Asian wisdom is admirable and beneficial for spreading the Gospel and that the cultural interaction will be the most important work now; on the other hand, it repeatedly asserts the danger of losing the traditional position of the Church and asks the members of the Church to know this position well enough in order to successfully adopt compatible cultural elements of different cultures into the life of the Church. *Ecclesia in Asia*, though more concentrating on Asian style of accepting messages, did not avoid this implicit unbalance.

This is shown also in another encyclical *Redemptoris Mission*:

...keeping in mind the positive elements acquired down the centuries from Christianity's contact with different cultures and not forgetting the dangers of alterations which have sometimes occurred.

Properly applied, inculturation must be guided by two principles: "compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal Church."...Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be "healed, ennobled and perfected."⁸⁴

There are more problems than theological debates of what are the "right" doctrines of the Church.

I would like to present more critics in the following section.

Critics on *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Fides et Ratio*

Depending on Phan's two articles "*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity" and "Inculturation of the Christian Faith in Asia through Philosophy: A Dialogue with John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio*," I may conclude what we have seen until now about the perspectives of John Paul II on inculturation in Asia. The first complaint from Phan is the bureaucratic language in this post-synodal exhortation. He questioned how much this helped the Asian Church. Unless concrete actions are taking **now**, a real impact of the Synod cannot be brought into full play. The meaning of the Synod and the exhortation from John Paul II lies more on the awareness of "Asianness" raised from within, that the Asian Church has "a new way of being church."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 53-54.

⁸⁵ *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 253.

Another important problem is related to Christology. As I have shown, John Paul II made a clear point that Jesus is “the only Savior,” a message that cannot be forgotten and confused among believers while proclaiming the Gospel. Phan gives a different opinion: that the accent of the Gospel message may not be so much on “the only Savior” as on “the Personal Savior” because even Vatican II itself did not reject a possibility that there are other *possible* ways “in which God can reach *other* people.”⁸⁶ Phan maintains that the true witness comes from the profound experience of Jesus as the “*personal* Savior for me,” and not from “the conviction that Jesus is the *only* Savior.”

This critique also examines the problem of the “exclusive character” of truth, mentioned in *Fides et Ratio*. Truth is singular in the context of the encyclical, but it would be difficult to judge Asian philosophy under such criterion. Phan argues that Asian philosophies tend to deal with the problem of truth in its manifested forms—truths, which are never in a singular form. “This view of reality itself as plural, or of the necessarily plural manifestation of reality, is found, for example, in Indian philosophies...”⁸⁷ Though they also admit the unity behind these plural forms (manifestations of truth), what is true in reality is never singular—for example, yin and yang, or wu-hsing (the Five Elements). Therefore the East and the West comprehend Truth/truths quite differently. Besides of the different starting points for perceiving truth, Phan is also concerned

⁸⁶ Ibid, 256.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 63.

about the possibility of a true “encounter” of faith and culture. What John Paul II warned about “a self-contained attitude or opposition against other traditions” of the Asian traditions (especially Indian traditions) seems to ironically echo what the Catholic Church itself is afraid of. If this attitude does not change, the true encounter of faith and culture will be impossible, according to Phan, because “genuine intercultural encounter...always involves mutual challenge, critique, correction, and enrichment so that a new *tertium quid* will emerge.”⁸⁸

While unity is the major concern of the Roman pontiff, the local churches must find their own ways to survive. Phan mentions that many claims in *Ecclesia in Asia* have been indicated by Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) “powerfully and in great detail.”⁸⁹ The critiques of Phan were also inspired by the fruits of FABC in most parts. Thus, before an examination on the Catholic Church regarding the issue of inculturation in Asia, I would like to introduce FABC, the most important group working on this issue, especially those works related to John Paul II’s exhortation, namely, the discussion and response around and after the Asian Synod.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 64.

⁸⁹ *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 173.

CHAPTER 3

ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES AND THE ASIAN SYNOD

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is the most important organization that is devoted to reflection and promotion of inculturation in Asia. Its foundation "is certainly a landmark in the history of Christianity in Asia."⁹⁰ Members of this transnational body are the episcopates (Conferences of Bishops) in South and East Asia, including Bangladesh, China, India-Nepal, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos-Kampuchea, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, with Hong Kong and Macao enjoying associate membership.⁹¹ When Pope Paul VI visited the Philippines in November, 1970, the bishops' gathering there offered a great chance for 180 Asian bishops to exchange, question, and discuss their pastoral experiences. Though not without a great diversity, these Asian experiences share "a spiritual affinity" and "common moral and religious values," especially those influences emanating from India and China.⁹² Since the first successful interaction, hereafter, a Plenary Assembly has been meeting every four year, and relative committees were organized for this voluntarily joint association.

⁹⁰ Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, ed. by Gaudencio B. Rosales DD and C. G. Arevalo, S.J. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), xxiii.

⁹¹ Among these, the Conference of Bishops in China means the "Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference," founded in Taiwan, 1967, since at that time, Mainland China was still banned from any public missions.

⁹² "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," xxiii-xxiv.

The first problem they found in the meeting was that the “foreignness” of the local churches in the land of Asia. This was the first occasion on which the word “inculturation” was used in the document of Asian bishops’ conferences. Thus the first and foremost responsibility of FABC is to develop and foster the inculturated Church **in** Asia. The official functions of FABC were:⁹³

- To study ways and means of promoting the apostolate, especially in the light of Vatican II and post-conciliar official documents, and according to the needs of Asia
- To work for and to intensify the dynamic presence of the Church in the total development of the peoples of Asia
- To help in the study of problems of common interest to the Church in Asia, and to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinated action
- To promote inter-communication and cooperation among local Churches and bishops of Asia
- To render service to episcopal conferences of Asia in order to help them to meet better the needs of the People of God
- To foster a more ordered development of organizations and movements in the Church at the international level.
- To foster ecumenical and interreligious communication and collaboration.

The structure of FABC includes:⁹⁴

- The Plenary Assembly: The supreme body of FABC, composed of all the presidents of member-conferences, other bishop delegates elected by member-conferences, the member/associate member in the Standing Committee, meets every four years.
- The Central Committee: An implemental body of the Plenary Assembly meeting every two years.

⁹³ These aims were quoted from the official website of FABC, <<http://www.fabc.org/about.html>>.

⁹⁴ Ref. the official website of FABC.

- The Standing Committee: The guiding body that directs and supports the Central Secretariat, implements the resolutions of the Central Committee.
- The Central Secretariat: With nine offices, it serves as an agency and instrument of coordination within FABC. The nine offices are: Offices of Human Development, Social Communication, Laity, Theological Concerns, Education and Student Chaplaincy, Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Evangelization, Clergy, and Consecrated Life.

Since the First Plenary Assembly in Taipei (1974), there have been eight Assemblies until now. I would like to list out the themes of the final statements for each Assembly here to make their concerns more clearly:

- FABC I (Taipei, April 27, 1974): “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia”
- FABC II (Calcutta, November 25, 1978): “Prayer—the Life of the church of Asia”
- FABC III (Bangkok, October 28, 1982): “The church—A Community of Faith in Asia”
- FABC IV (Tokyo, September 16, 1986): “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the church and in the World of Asia”
- FABC V (Bandung, July 27, 1990): “Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium”
- FABC VI (Manila, January 19, 1995): “Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life”
- FABC VII (Samphran, January 12, 2000): “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service”

- FABC VIII (Daejeon, August 23, 2004): “The Asian Family Towards of a Culture of Integral Life”

The Threefold Dialogue

In the titles that I presented above, several motifs were repeated: service to the society, mission/evangelization, and solidarity as the **Asian** Church. Jonathan Tan Yun-Ka argued that as early as in 1974, the FABC had related inculturation to the local church in a dialogical scheme. This threefold dialogue reflected the concern of FABC, and also of the local churches in Asia.

The themes in the Plenary Assemblies obviously were generated from this threefold scheme:⁹⁵

- *Inculturation*, which renders the local church truly present within the life of our people.
- *Dialogue* with the great Asian religions, which brings them into contact with the Gospel, so that the seed of the Word in them may come to full flower.
- *Service of the poor*, uniting with them in their struggle for a more human world.

These three dimensions were mentioned again in the preparatory document of the Asian Synod, “Relatio ante disceptationem,” presented by Paul Shan Kuo-Hsi: “Today the Church is aware that her evangelizing mission has many dimensions including dialogue, inculturation and human promotion. The importance of these elements of evangelization is reflected in all the major documents of the Magisterium in recent years.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ FABC I, “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly,” April 27, 1974, *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, ed. by Gaudencio B. Rosales DD and C. G. Arevalo, S.J. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 23.

⁹⁶ “Relatio ante disceptationem,” 15.

I would like to utilize a triangle here to illustrate this threefold scheme:

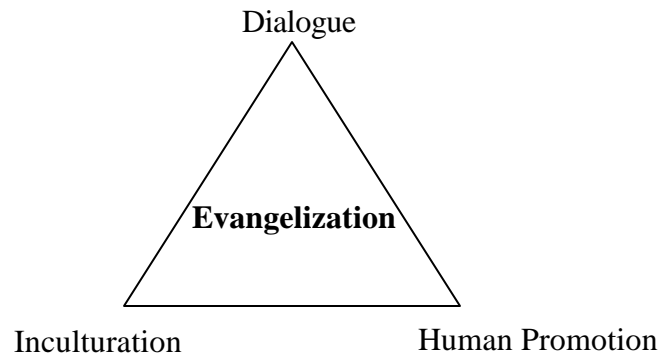


ILLUSTRATION 1 The Threefold Scheme of Asian evangelization

In fact, each dimension corresponds to a different dialogue: with cultures, with religions and the poor. These three dimensions are not distinctively separate, but an “integrated whole.”⁹⁷

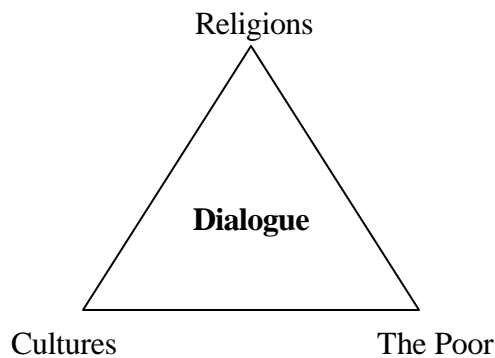


ILLUSTRATION 2 The Threefold Scheme Corresponding to Three Objects

Following the threefold pattern, three institutes were also set up for goals respectively: Bishops Institutes for Religious and Ecumenical Affairs (BIRA), Bishops’ Institutes for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), and Bishops’ Institutes for Social Action (BISA). From this perspective,

⁹⁷ “Inculturation in Asia: The Asian Approach of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC),” 257.

FABC has been aware from the beginning that inculturation is more than external adaptation, but “a dialogical encounter between the Gospel and the local church on the one hand; and the Asian reality as an integrated whole of Asian cultures, religions, and the teeming masses of the Asian poor and marginalized on the other.”⁹⁸ Besides, Stephen Bevans, SVD also pointed out “inculturation” developed in FABC’s approach so that it finally tied up with the dialogue with religion and with the poor, not just with culture.⁹⁹

The above quotation is especially interesting to look at. I would discuss more about the struggle between the Universal Church and the local churches in Chapter 4. As to the complexity of the Asian reality, it should be noticed that the encounter of Gospel with the Asian Cultures was never one to one, but one to many. “The Encounter of the Gospel need not always be with one homogeneous culture. It could be with a diversity of ethnic, linguistic or cultural groups living in the same locality.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the cultural interaction in Asia is multiple—not only because of the cultural differences among different areas, but more deeply, because of the differences within the same area. This is a more delicate and profound insight compared to the general description of Asian inculturation from Vatican, one which in fact, extends from a real experience of the local bishops. This reflection of FABC also faintly raises an issue similar to the one I mentioned in the

⁹⁸ Ibid, 267.

⁹⁹ Stephen Bevans, SVD, “Twenty-Five Years of Inculturation in Asia: The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, 1970-1995,” *FABC Papers*, No. 78 (On-line Index), 1997.
<<http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-78-bevans.htm>>.

¹⁰⁰ “Inculturation in Asia: The Asian Approach of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC),” 262

previous chapter—the different visions of reality (between the West and the East), the vision of oneness contrasting the vision of plurality.

Another interesting parallel, indicated by Jonathan Tan Yun-Ka in his analysis, is the corresponding threefold scheme of dynamics in the process of inculturation, including the Incarnation, the Pascal mystery, and the Pentecost.¹⁰¹ *Ecclesia in Asia* truly acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is the dynamic that moves the Asian Church to her mission, and yet the argument that the work of the Holy Spirit is never apart from the only Savior Jesus is a tricky discrepancy between John Paul II's tone and the FABC's. The more Christocentric tone from Rome also makes problematic dialogues with other religions. The insistence on "the fundamental commitment of the Christian faith that Jesus Christ is the definitive, ultimate, and final and fully divine revelation of the Godhead" certainly makes the dialogues more difficult.¹⁰²

Since I have mentioned the threefold scheme of FABC, two dimensions of which, on the one hand, were understood as the fruits of the reflections on inculturation by John Paul II and, on the other hand, treated differently in his thoughts, represented by the post-synodal exhortation, I would like to briefly touch the third dimension: dialogue with the poor (human promotion). It seems that a common consensus was made on the issue of promoting social justice without too

¹⁰¹ Ibid, cf. FABC office of Theological Concerns, "Thesis on the Local Church," *FABC Papers*, No 60, Thesis 10, 1991.

¹⁰² Wayne Teasdale, *Catholicism in Dialogue: Conversations Across Traditions* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), p.88.

many theological debates, and thus I did not intend to present a lot about the ethical concerns, due to the focus of my thesis. The only thing I would like to mention is that the priority for the poor has been always related to the issue of inculturation since Vatican II,¹⁰³ and both FABC and John Paul II devoted a lot of thoughts to this issue. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, the whole chapter six dealt with the social teaching of the Catholic Church and the true witnesses as promoting human dignity. Various tasks were mentioned in the exhortation, such as the improvement of the rights of the poor and of women and children, public health, education, mutual peace, foreign debt, ecological protection and so on.¹⁰⁴ Most of John Paul II's references in these discussion were from the bishops in the Synod, according to "The Synod's Propositions," especially propositions 20 (Healing Ministry), 21 (Education), 22 (Human Rights and the Promotion of Justice and peace), and 23 (Peacemaking).¹⁰⁵ Besides, John Paul II and the Asian bishops shared "a deep concern with the growth of Western consumer values brought on by the new economic forces," which was deeply related to the gap of the rich and poor, and other social issues.¹⁰⁶ Thus most of the arguments between the Roman Pontiff and the Asian bishops are the concerns about the dialogues with culture and with religion.

¹⁰³ Cf. Chapter 1 "Vatican II and Inculturation," 16-17.

¹⁰⁴ *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 33-41.

¹⁰⁵ "The Synod's Propositions," 147-149.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 155.

Asian Bishops and the Asian Synod: Preparatory Stage

Now I am going to turn the center of gravity back to the Asian Synod. As I have presented in the previous pages, many achievements of FABC were acknowledged in the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, including a need for the inculturated Asian Church, the importance of dialogue with local wisdom (religions and traditions), the renewal of the formation of laity and the religious, especially regarding to the integration of Asian cultures and the Christian faith. Social justice was also another important issue discussed in the exhortation, especially the priority of caring for the poor.¹⁰⁷ In this section and the following I would like to examine how the Asian bishops work throughout the Asian Synod, and their response to *Ecclesia in Asia*.

In the preparatory stage, the problems of the Roman Curia and the local Asian churches had emerged from the responses of the bishops to the preparatory document “Lineamenta” (“Outline”). “Lineamenta” was prepared by the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, with the consultation of the Pope, the Bishops’ Conferences, the heads of Vatican Offices of the Roman Curia, and the Union of Superiors General (representatives from the religious orders). It sounds like a work drawn from extensive opinions; however, it dissatisfied many local bishops after they sedulously studied the document. Among them, Phan and Tan especially pointed out

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 34.

complaints from Japanese and Indonesian bishops.¹⁰⁸ The concerns of theirs were the radical doubt of the purpose and the methods of the Synod.

In the response of Indonesian bishops, the first problem was provided as the problem of evangelization. Interestingly, in addition to the hardship that the local Asian churches generally met (a multi-cultural-religious environment), they especially mentioned the “legalism and a superiority complex within the Church” as the obstacles for evangelization.¹⁰⁹ Tan, in his evaluation, noticed this emphasis from the Indonesian bishops, and pointed out that the narrow scope of the preparatory document (more of a Vatican-centered document) on evangelization as proclaiming Jesus Christ, “failed to reflect adequately the triple dialogue approach of the FABC.”¹¹⁰ Another complaint from Indonesian bishops was concerned about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. They wanted to develop a more “inclusive” language to talk about Jesus Christ as the Savior not only of the Western people, or of the Christians, but also of the Asian people. “Lineamenta” disappointed them because proclaiming Jesus as the “one and only Savior,” suggested in the document, could not be the common ground of Evangelization.¹¹¹ Furthermore, they argued the problems of liturgy. The liturgy in the Catholic Church now still keeps mostly its

¹⁰⁸ “Introduction,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, 2-3; Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan, “The Responses of the Indonesian and Japanese Bishops to the *Lineamenta*,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 59-72.

¹⁰⁹ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Indonesia, “Responses of the Asian Episcopal conferences to the *Lineamenta*,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 23.

¹¹⁰ “The Responses of the Indonesian and Japanese Bishops to the *Lineamenta*,” 60.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 60-61.

“Roman-rite” form, which I have mentioned in the discussion of Vatican II. Indonesian bishops saw how this non-indigenous liturgy obstructed the incarnation of Christian faith and hinted that the Vatican authority had the responsibility for approving local liturgy rites and texts.¹¹²

As to the response of the Japanese bishops, more subtle questions came to the scene. The first thing they mentioned was that they spent three months translating the document “Lineamenta” in order to provide every bishop and the laity in the parishes copies to read, which made them have to hurry to respond to Rome.¹¹³ This fact immediately aroused their concern about the use of language and more time for the preparatory stage of the Synod. They pointed out that the official languages used by the Holy See (Italian, English, French, German, Spanish) were not among any of the native languages spoken by Asian people. Though, in the case of the Philippines and Indonesia, they used English as the common language because of too many different local languages used, they were only two of almost forty countries that prepared to join the Synod, which made them exceptional. Meanwhile, they also called for more autonomy of the Asian bishops in this Synod, such as the choice of the chairpersons of the committees and small groups, and utilizing more fruits from FABC in the discussion session. These suggestions were only methodological considerations; as for theological concerns, Japanese bishops gave more

¹¹² Ibid, 61.

¹¹³ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan, “Responses of the Asian Episcopal conferences to the *Lineamenta*,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 27.

thoughts, mainly the fruits of FABC: (1) Christology: Japanese bishops commented that the attitude of “Lineamenta” contained a “certain defensiveness and apologetic” tone. They argued that “Jesus Christ is the way, the Truth and the Life, but in Asia, before stressing that Jesus Christ is the Truth, we must search much more deeply into how he is the Way and the Life.”¹¹⁴ (2) Soteriology: as expressed in the claim of Christology, the interpretation of the incarnation of Christ and his salvation is to be understandable by Asian people. (3) Ecclesiology: the themes “dialogue” and “service,” which were developed by FABC and represented respectively two images of the Church, “people of God” and “servant,” were not sufficiently stressed. (4) Missiology: “proclamation” was much more emphasized than dialogue, but the latter was a much more important issue due to the reality of Asia. This is also the same argument that was brought up by Indonesian bishops in different phrasing. (5) “Lineamenta” lacks an understanding of Asian situations today, “which is a mixture of traditional Asian culture and an Americanized modern culture.”¹¹⁵ From Indonesian and Japanese bishops’ responses, Tan concluded that they revealed “a marked rejection of the triumphalism of an exclusive Christology from above, which insists upon the explicit proclamation and acceptance of Christ as the one and only savior in preference for an inclusive Christology form below, which affirms that Christ is constitutive of

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 30.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 31.

human salvation even if some people do not acknowledge explicitly his mediatory role.”¹¹⁶

Though later on in the revised preparatory document “Instrumentum Laboris” (“Working Document”), some of the Asian bishops’ views were incorporated, unfortunately, it seems that the post-synodal exhortation did not give much assent to this cry for a shift from a proclamation-centered attitude to a dialogue-centered attitude.

The Asian Synod in Process

We have discussed some critiques of Phan toward *Ecclesia in Asia*, and how the Asian bishops disagreed with the preparatory document, the tone of which still remained to quite a degree in *Ecclesia in Asia*. I would like to give more facts about events of the Synod in order that the overall critics in the fourth chapter can be understood. Thomas Fox, the former editor of *National Catholic Reporter*, gave his comments on the Synod.¹¹⁷ The first thing he questioned was the secrecy of the Synod. The Vatican distilled the discussions and then gave them to the press, which failed to show the vitality or the interaction among the bishops in the initial session of the Synod.¹¹⁸ The methodological problems that the Japanese bishops had suggested, including more time for the translation of “Instrumentum Laboris” (the revised version of “Lineamenta”

¹¹⁶ “The Responses of the Indonesian and Japanese Bishops to the *Lineamenta*,” 64.

¹¹⁷ *National Catholic Reporter* is an independent newsweekly that is frequently the first to report on serious issues important to thinking Catholics and the first place to find open, honest and ongoing discussion of those issues. The official website: <<http://ncronline.org/mainpage/about.htm>>.

¹¹⁸ *Pentecost in Asia*, 150.

after the responses of Asian bishops were received), were also ignored probably due to “a race to meet the pre-established schedule to complete the continental synods before the magic year 2000,” sarcastically commented Phan.¹¹⁹ Even after the radical suggestions of the Japanese bishops, the theme of the Synod, “Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia, ‘that they may have life and have it abundantly’” remained unchanged. Thomas Fox also observed acutely that the tension continued in the opening mass. The synodal opening mass, though adopting Japanese bishops’ propositions to utilize several different Asian languages in singing and praying, “unluckily” left out Japanese.¹²⁰

The Synod started according to Rome’s request, not the request of Asian bishops, and in fact they had been working through different joint associations, especially FABC. Even so, the Synod did not end in as a meaningless formality. The bishops “spoke freely and from their hearts;” some of whom boldly criticized the stubborn style of the Rome authority.¹²¹ Thomas Fox summarized what had been proposed through those first days in the Synod: “the need to establish a more balanced relationship between the central and local churches; the need for greater cultural sensitivity and diversity in Catholic religious expression; the need to affirm Christian life through service and solidarity with the poor; and the need to cooperate with the other religions of Asia in

¹¹⁹ “Introduction,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, 3.

¹²⁰ *Pentecost in Asia*, 170.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 172.

addressing the pressing social and economic crises of the times.”¹²² All in all, quoting Cardinal Shan Kuo-Hsi in the “*Relatio ante disceptationem*,” the Asian churches needed to figure out “how they can communicate their God-experience in Jesus Christ to the people of Asia in a manner which is truly inculturated and thus intelligible to them.”¹²³ Another important quotation from Orlando Quevedo of Nueva Segovia, Philippines, was even more on target: “Catholic uniformity must be replaced with Catholic diversity.”¹²⁴

The problem of the Vatican’s insistence on uniformity immediately transmits my discussion to the most practical issue: liturgy and translation. Until today, Asian churches still have to ask for approval from Rome about the liturgical texts and other official documents translated by the local churches into native languages. However, it is very problematic because the Rome authority itself could hardly understand the Asian languages. How can they understand the cultural background of these Asian churches, or the nuances in languages? Without the trust of the Vatican in the local churches, the true inculturation can not be done. The statement of Bishop Francico Claver, S.J., given in the Synod, proved such absurdity and the lack of trust of Vatican toward the local churches:

Let me give just one example of this lack of trust and it has to do with a simple thing—liturgical language. Why do we have to send vernacular translations of the liturgy to Rome for approval? Or to the bishop of the place, for that matter, if he doesn’t speak the

¹²² Ibid, 174.

¹²³ “*Relatio ante disceptationem*,” 8.

¹²⁴ *Pentecost in Asia*, 175.

language in question? Don't we trust our people enough to speak the language of orthodoxy? But in truth the best judges of the correctness, even theological, of translations and texts are the faithful and clergy of the place where the language is spoken.¹²⁵

In the period of group discussions (right after the presentation of each bishop participant), this concern for the final authority on local liturgical texts once again stirred up. The full authority of deciding the Asian churches' liturgy was requested by some bishops, and some even suggested the approval of using non-biblical classics in the liturgy. More indigenous symbols were required. The Asian bishops cared for "severing the umbilical cords of colonialism," which made the churches foreign to Asian people.¹²⁶

Many of the concerns raised in the Synod did not present themselves in "Relatio post disceptationem," a mid-synod report for a follow-up discussion after the reports from each bishop participant, and *Ecclesia in Asia*. As Thomas Fox commented, "the running of the Synod on Asia was kept entirely in the hands of curial officials. The FABC gathering, by contrast, would be the products of Asian minds."¹²⁷ Though it was the case, this Synod was not a failure. The fellowship between Asian bishops was renewed and strengthened, and they were also more aware of the huge differences among each country. They learned from other bishops' experiences, and they had the chance to speak out in front of the Rome curia, and to the universal church.

¹²⁵ Francisco Claver, S.J., "Inculturation as Dialogue," *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 101.

¹²⁶ *Pentecost in Asia*, 182.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 186, cf. *Pentecost in Asia*, 181. A vivid description of the follow-up discussion by Thomas Fox still revealed that the Rome authority tried to "teach" rather than to "learn" from the local bishops..

After the Synod

The Asia Synod took place from April 19 to May 14, 1998. More pressure on Asian leadership from Rome continued. Thomas Fox cited two events to signify such tension. The first one is the censure from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, whose prefect was the present Pope, to the writings of Anthony de Mello, an Indian Jesuit priest. Though the notification issued in August, 1998 acknowledged De Mello's works as "achieving self-mastery," "breaking the bonds and feelings that keep us from being free" and "approaching with serenity the various vicissitudes of life" in their brief-story form, De Mello was still accused of deviations from the biblical messages, among those including his indication of an unknown and impersonal God, his attitude toward Jesus as if He was just one of the many wise masters, and his opposition of the Church's authority to teach.¹²⁸

The second case was about Jesuit Jacques Dupuis' book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. In October 1998, Dupuis was called to Rome for the investigation of this book, and it took the congregation three years to make a quite dispiriting though not completely negative decision on this book. The final "Notification" warned that "his book contained notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points, which could lead a reader to erroneous

¹²⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Notification: Concerning the Writings of Father Anthony de Mello, S.J.," 1998.

or harmful opinions.”¹²⁹ Then the “Notification” went on to assert some of the official teachings, which were considered not properly affirmed in Dupuis’ words. These includes the sole and universal salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the unicity and completeness of revelation of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific action of the Holy Spirit, the orientation of all human beings to the Church, and the value and salvific function of the religious traditions.¹³⁰

On November 6, 1999, the seventy-nine-year-old pope travelled to New Delhi, India, and presented the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*. His sincerity for knowing and touching the land of Asia was true, but the message in the exhortation, as I have discussed, still gave the bishops and the Asian believers, a sense of uneasiness. Priest John Mansford Prior, who did a study on the tone and voice of *Ecclesia in Asia*, observed:

In the Apostolic Exhortation and the synodal interventions we listen to two different voices coming from two different worlds. The voice of Asia is vibrant with life authentically lived in all its vitality, color and spontaneity. The rhythm of Rome beats to a doctrine correctly intoned and broadcast in its entirety.¹³¹

An even clearer contrast is introduced by Edmund Chia, who did a subtle comparison of the voice of *Ecclesia in Asia* and the response of Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, the President Delegate of the Synod for Asia. John Paul II regards other religions as “a great challenge to evangelization” and in a need “to await their fulfillment in Jesus Christ,” while the Cardinal

¹²⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, “Notification: On the Book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J.,” 2001.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ John Mansford Prior, “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 239.

asserts the more important thing is that “the local Churches be capable of seeing the religious values and the culture they [the other religions] embody,” and that they “need to be considered specifically as partners in dialogue.” The Cardinal is suggesting the Church learn from Asian cultures rather than to “fulfill” them, for Jesus “has always been present and working in the world, including the world of Asia.”¹³² The key, for this Cardinal, seems to turn from a “proclaiming” to a “rediscovering” of Jesus in Asia. In this emphasis, therefore, the key of inculturation for the Cardinal is not just to understand various cultures for “the dialogue of salvation,” but to grow in them “in deepest inner aspirations as peoples of Asia.”¹³³

John Paul II wrote, ‘She [the Church] seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers.’ When he said this, he was expressing how adequate expression in one’s cultural context can make the message of Gospel more acceptable for people in Asia—the hearer of it. Yet the yearning of Asian Christians is beyond this because, quoting Cardinal Darmaatmadja again, “it is true that there is no authentic evangelization without announcing Jesus Christ, Savior to the whole human race. But for Asia, there will be no complete evangelization unless there is dialogue with other religions and cultures. There is no full evangelization if there is no answer to the deep yearnings of the peoples of Asia.”¹³⁴

¹³² Edmund Chia, “Of Fork and Spoon or Fingers and Chopsticks: Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*,” *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 276-277.

¹³³ Ibid, 277.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 278.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUES ON INCULTURATION IN AISA

Inculturation in Asia, as shown from the previous chapters, involves in different areas (religions, cultures, social services) and complicated power struggles. Facing such a multifarious and jumbled issue, I attempt to pull several threads out of such a tangle. I will discuss the issue of inculturation in Asia from FABC's works and others that were related to the theological debates. These would be divided into the discussion in ecclesiology, corresponding to the problem between the Rome authority and the local churches; Christology, corresponding to different emphasis on proclamation and the relationship between the Catholic Church and other religions in Asia; and the methodology of Asian theology, corresponding to the problem of the applicability of Greco-Roman model to the Asian churches and how to inculturate faith in Asia.

The Ecclesiological Issue

As one can observe from the Asian Synod, the Asian bishops try to defend the autonomy of the local churches. They reject a traditional structure of the church as the "monolithic pyramid." Francis Hadisumarta, Bishop of Manokwar, Indonesia, presented this attitude in the Synod, which spoke the innermost feelings of Asian bishops:

Bishops are not branch secretaries waiting for instructions from headquarters! We are a communion of Churches. Paul is the great apostle of collegiality...[He] rarely ordered or instructed; argued yes, commanded no. In Paul's time, decision making was in the hands of the local community with a council of elders (*episcopoi* and *presbyteroi*) at their head.¹³⁵

The Indonesian bishop proceeded to argue that more areas should be left to the episcopal conferences, such as the selection and appointment of bishops, the discipline of the clergy, and the ordination of *viri probati* ("approved man") to solve the problem of the lack of priests.

The key theological ground here is the "communion (*Koinonia*) of Churches," or "collegiality." In fact, as early as Vatican II, the hierarchical thinking had started to change. The council emphasized "the Church as people of God, the Church as communion, the notions of episcopal collegiality, co-responsibility and lay participation."¹³⁶ The relationship between the pope and episcopal conferences was explained explicitly in *Lumen Gentium*:

Just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, St. Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the Successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together. Indeed, the very ancient practice whereby bishops duly established in all parts of the world were in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity, charity and peace, and also the councils assembled together in which more profound issues were settled in common, the opinion of the many having been prudently considered, both of these factors are already an indication of the collegiate character and aspect of the episcopal order, and the ecumenical councils held in the course of centuries are also manifest proof of that same character.

...however, that the power of binding and loosing, which was given to Peter (Mt 16:19), was granted also to the college of apostles, joined with their head.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Francis Hadisumarta, O. C.M., "The church as communion," *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 119.

¹³⁶ Orlando B. Quevedo, "Church Leadership and Governance," as Part (13) of "Inculturation in Asia: Directions, Initiatives, and Options," *FABC Papers*, No. 115, ed. by James H. Kroeger, M.M. (On-line Index), 2005. <<http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-115.htm>>.

¹³⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, No. 22.

The “apostolic college” and the sharing of “collegiate character” among bishops echo what the Indonesian bishop required in the Asian Synod. In the quoted passage from *Lumen Gentium*, this quality of the coalition of the many and the validation of the ecumenical councils derive their legitimacy from this notion of “collegiality.” Robert A. Burns, O.P. pointed out that collegiality is different from both monarchy and democracy. The former implies the authority has the right to decide whether or not taking the advice; the latter implies the majority opinion of the people will have the final word. Collegiality works differently: “the head of the Church, or for that matter a local pastor, must take ultimate responsibility for decisions that are made but act in a consultative manner with the people of God.”¹³⁸

Though Vatican II did not deny the “primacy of the pope” and expressed plainly that “this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff,” it was anticipated that after Vatican II, local churches would have gotten more autonomy. Truly, there were many institutions, on different levels, erected: “the worldwide synod of bishops, national and regional episcopal conferences, national and diocesan pastoral Councils, parish Councils, priests’ senates, and the like.”¹³⁹ Nevertheless, John Paul II brought the Catholic Church surprisingly to a totally reverse direction—a highly Rome-centered (or Pope-centered) Church. In the year of 2001 when John

¹³⁸ Robert A. Burns, O.P., *Roman Catholicism After Vatican II* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 50.

¹³⁹ Avery Dulles, S.J., “Vatican II Reform: The Basic Principles,” as part [C] of “The Second Vatican Council and the Church in Asia: Readings and Reflections,” *FABC Papers*, No. 117, ed. by James H. Kroeger, M.M. (On-line Index), 2005 <<http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-117.htm>>.

Paul II assigned forty-four new cardinals, there had been 125 out of 135 cardinals (including the new ones) appointed by him.¹⁴⁰ Bishops complained that the Holy See did not really “consult” with them, but gave them a lot of directives as if they were no more than his “subordinate officers,” just as happened in the Asian Synod. A universal Church was believed, to precede the local churches; yet it was problematic when this universal Church was identified with the Pope and the Roman Curia.¹⁴¹

What are the reasons behind Papal supreme authority? Though acknowledging the importance of collegiality, described by Avery Dulles, John Paul II understood it not merely in a “political or sociological sense, but in relation to the communion with God that binds together the whole people of God in a mysterious supernatural unity.”¹⁴² John Paul II believed that the structure of one head (Pope, the successor of Peter) and bishops (the successors of the apostles) was the intrinsic plan of God. Thus collegiality may never be unless “with and under Peter as their head,” alluding to *Ad Gentes*.¹⁴³ Exactly because of this conviction, he understood magisterium as “one and universal,” and each bishop “represents the universal magisterium in a particular diocese.” Thus every bishop “must” keep communion with the head of bishops, that is, pope himself, as he stressed again in the

¹⁴⁰ *The Pontiff in Winter*, 204.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 209.

¹⁴² Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 79-80.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 79, cf. *Ad Gentes*, No. 38.

encyclical “*Veritatis Splendor*.”¹⁴⁴ As for the Pope, this universal magisterium consisted not only of the consensus achieved by all the bishops (agreed with the pope without doubt) but also of the expressions *ex cathedra*. In this way, John Paul II’s idea about the bishops’ conferences was a “guarding” attitude, according to his cognition of the papal responsibility. Dulles referred to John Paul II’s concern about abuse: the conferences might develop as a kind of “national church” which would do harm to the universal communion of the Catholics.¹⁴⁵

As to the idea of the Asian bishops, who have been working on the theology of this “communion of the Church” for more than thirty years since the foundation of FABC, the stress was first on the communion of the local churches in Asia. “It is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life.”¹⁴⁶ And then the theme of the **local church** as the main subject of mission and evangelization came to the foreground.

...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 (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of goodwill) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed...

¹⁴⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Vatican City: August 6, 1993), No. 117.
<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html>.

¹⁴⁵ *The Splendor of Faith*, 81-82.

¹⁴⁶ FABC I, *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, 14.

This local church, which is the acting subject of mission, is the people of God in a given milieu, the whole Christian community—laity, Religious and clergy. It is the whole diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community and other groups. Their time has come for Asia.¹⁴⁷

This communion not only focuses on its characteristic of “locality” but also on its “inclusiveness.”

The Christian communities must not only consider their believers but also dialogue with other non-believers, other religions, other “persons of good will.”

When we Compare John Paul II’s idea to that of the Asian bishops, we see these structures:

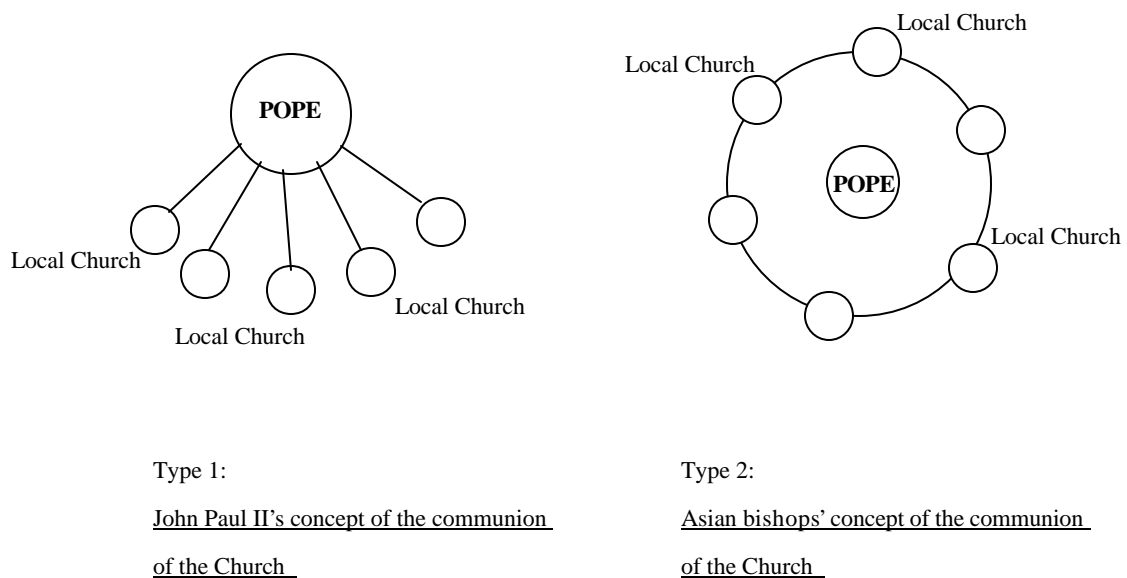


ILLUSTRATION 3 Comparison of John Paul II’s and Asian Bishops’ Ideas on the Communion of the Church

¹⁴⁷ FABC V, “Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium: Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly,” July 27, 1990, *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, ed. by Gaudencio B. Rosales DD and C. G. Arevalo, S.J. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 281.

As Shorter described, “much more is said about the particular churches being receptive to the papal magisterium.” The Catholic Church needs more than one-sided communication in order to actualize the “collegial character” mentioned by Vatican II.¹⁴⁸

The Christological Issue

From the previous discussion of John Paul II and Asian bishops, there are two major points that bring both sides into conflicts. First, Christ as savior is not questionable, but the emphasis that he is the only one true Savior is not welcomed by Asian bishops. Accompanied with this, the explicit proclamation of Jesus is not as urgent as the implicit witness of him (e.g. the service of the poor) for the bishops. Second, by means of inculturation, Asian bishops are trying to discover “the Asian faces of Jesus” that would make more sense to the Asian people. *Ecclesia in Asia* acknowledges the need for inculturation, especially inculturated Christology, but the attitude of Vatican seems to contradict this acknowledgement. *Dominus Iesus*, a declaration issued from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000, displayed such tension. It reaffirms the basic traditional doctrine and tends to be antagonistic toward other religions, even non-Catholic Christians. Some of the major “errors” pointed out by this declaration included the indistinguishability between the Christian faith and faith in other religions, or between the inspiration of the Bible and the wisdom writings in other

¹⁴⁸ *Toward A Theology of Inculturation*, 252.

religions; the perspective that Jesus was only one of the many manifestations of Logos (or God), or that the revelation of Jesus must be complemented by other revelations in different religions. The “unicity,” “universality,” and “absoluteness” of this faith in Christ (his birth, death and resurrection) and the faith in the Church should not be avoided (at least for the members of the Catholic Church?), as some theologians suggested. “Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel..One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments.”¹⁴⁹

This declaration, obviously, was to warn the rising tendency of religions pluralism. It cautions that “...a religious relativism which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another,’” by quoting *Redemptoris Missio*.¹⁵⁰ It clearly claimed that the preposition in interreligious dialogues, **equality**, was alluded to “the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue,” not to “doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵¹

It is understandable that “reactions toward the declaration were generally negative.”¹⁵² Thomas Fox quoted La Salle brother Edmund Chia, who said that “religious pluralism is an existential reality for many of us, and not just a theory or theological concept.....”¹⁵³ These are also

¹⁴⁹ Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (Vatican City: August 6, 2000), No. 21. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

¹⁵⁰ *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 36.

¹⁵¹ *Dominus Iesus*, No. 22.

¹⁵² *Pentecost in Asia*, 193.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 194.

the hearty words of Asian bishops. The transitional point of FABC, as Edmund Chia pointed out, was the fifth Plenary Assembly (FABC V), which Edmund Chia called as “new way of being church.”¹⁵⁴ FABC V mentioned that the renewal of faith is to realize that God reveals His Word to all, at all times.

[Christ] draws all peoples to himself through his Church, and through other ways unknown to us. He is the light that enlightens every human being (Jn 1:9). He has imprinted traces of his revelation in the world which exists in him (Col 1:16), and in the “seeds of the Word” found in cultures and in other religious traditions. The Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, and ever-present and active in the Church, in the world and in the human heart, leads all to their unity and fulfillment.¹⁵⁵

The notion of “seeds of the Word” and “through other ways unknown” already appeared in Vatican II.¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, this reflection from Asian bishops was new because it developed in the reality of Asia—a reality with two existential poles: the cultural-religious plurality, and the pervasiveness of the poor.¹⁵⁷ Thus Asian bishop felt the urgency to make the message of salvation really “universal”—available to every Asian. Bearing this in mind, the mission of the Asian church was redefined, not so much as “soul-saving” or “church-planting,” but a desire to invite all into “God’s kingdom,” a universal kingdom. “Wherever men and women open themselves

¹⁵⁴ Edmund Chia, “Thirty Years of FABC: History, Foundation, Context and Theology,” *FABC Papers*, No. 106 (On-line Index), 2003. <<http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-106.htm>>.

¹⁵⁵ FABC V, *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, 279-280.

¹⁵⁶ *Ad Gentes*, No. 7, 22; *Lumen Gentium*, No. 16.

¹⁵⁷ “Thirty Years of FABC,” 3.2.2., cf. Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 69. “Any discussion about Asian theology has to move between two poles: the *Third Worldness* of our continent and its peculiarly *Asian* character. More realistically and precisely, the common denominator linking Asia with the rest of the Third World is its overwhelming poverty. The specific character defining Asia within the other poor countries is its multifaceted religiousness.”

to the transcendent divine mystery which impinges upon them to go out of themselves in love and service of fellow humans, there the reign of God is at work.”¹⁵⁸ While Mother Teresa was a living witness to this theology of “God’s kingdom,” this salvic message by collaboration between Christians and others rather than the exclusive doctrine of faith, made FABC unique in its ways of evangelization.

More Arguments on Presenting Jesus as Savior

Jesus asked his disciple: “Who do you say I am?” (Mt. 16:16) This question was answered by Simon: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:17). It was answered by the Council of Niceae that “the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father...Begotten, not made, one in being with the Father.” And he is believed as “one *hypostasis*, two *physeis*” in the Council of Chalcedon. Peter C. Phan asked an unavoidable question: should the people of Asia be spiritually a Jew, or intellectually a Westerner, in order to be Christian?¹⁵⁹ Edmund Chia also asked “How would Asians respond to the question ‘Who do you say I am?’” This is the starting point of Asian faces of Jesus. Paul Shan Kuo-Hsi in his presentation “Relatio Ante Disceptationem,” in the Synod mentioned several major points.

¹⁵⁸ FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the Theological Consultation,” November 10, 1991, *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, ed. by Gaudencio B. Rosales DD and C. G. Arevalo, S.J. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 341.

¹⁵⁹ *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 98.

First, Asian people seek harmony between heaven and earth—a harmony between man, nature and divine. Shan explained that “both in philosophical reflection and in worship forms they seek to bridge the contradiction” in between.¹⁶⁰ Thus to provide Jesus as the mediator between the divine and the man could be a good departure for Asian people. This also echoes what Edmund Chia reviewed in FABC papers: “first and foremost, the Christ of Asian Christians is ‘the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation’ (cf. Col. 1:15).”¹⁶¹

Second, the “self-emptying” Jesus may be more close to Asian people than the absolute divine Jesus. In the tradition of Asian religions, the discipline of self-emptying is very important, and from this point, one may receive more from Jesus and accept his birth, death and resurrection because “He emptied himself so that all may be filled with the fullness of life.”¹⁶² He is the suffering servant of God, who “shares the pain, poverty, rejection and exploitation of the Asian peoples.” According to this, to proclaim Jesus must to serve as he did: to walk with the poor, the women and those who need help. “It is not doctrinal arguments which will make the Person of Jesus Christ appealing and acceptable to Asian people; the witness given by Christians to Jesus Christ will be convincing.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ “Relatio ante disceptationem,” 10.

¹⁶¹ “Thirty Years of FABC,” 3.2.4.

¹⁶² “Relatio ante disceptationem,” 10.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

How did *Dominus Iesus* reflect the question who Jesus is? It reviewed the doctrine achieved in the Council of Nicaea, and reminded again that “of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12). For Asian bishops, their theology was never incompatible with Jesus as the Savior, but it is the matter of interpretation that brought them to the conclusion that they have first to speak in an Asian language, and second, to speak in an Asian tone. Shan spoke of the presentation of Jesus as such: “The source of the Church’s faith and mission remains the same: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’” When he said that, he meant the experience of Jesus, “no matter what cultural expression, doctrinal formulation and interpretation it has undergone nor what emphasis it has received in different periods of history.” However, it will still take a long time to make this switch recognized by the Rome authority.

CONCLUSION

In an extensive way I did this thesis, trying to touch all the phases in the controversy of inculturation in the Asian Catholic Church. It is a really large issue, gathering all the contemporary discussions to the stage. First, it is the organizational struggle between Rome and the local churches. Though Vatican II already pointed out a way that both pope and the bishops might share a decisive power, it was not successfully practiced under John Paul II's pontificate.

Second, it is the religious argument that gives the Catholic Church a hard time. The multi-religious quality of Asia rendered a chance to Asian bishops to work on an inclusive theology, whereas Vatican authority tended to be very cautious of this "new" theology, as liberation theology was censored during the 1980s. In my thesis, it can be suggested that Asian bishops have no intention of developing a theology of religious pluralism; yet they rather believe it is a reality and they have to deal with it. Thus, their ground could not be the "only one true Savior," but a ground that makes dialogue with other religions possible, for example, Jesus the sufferer, Jesus the healer, Jesus the teacher, and still, Jesus the savior, without an explicit "S."

Third, it is the cultural dynamics that left the Vatican authority isolated from its local churches. Traditional seminaries or the discipline of priests still work in a Western theological base. Certainly, it takes time to develop an Asian (or more than one) theology, but how much

does the Vatican authority know about their new people—from Latin America, Africa, and Asia? More effort is needed in order to bring the authority close to the “ordinary people,” the people of different cultures.

Two of Shusaku Endo’s novels came to my mind. One is “Silence,” published in 1986, which described the story about two Portuguese missionaries in Japan. Facing the difficult situation in which one of the surviving missionaries had to choose between apostasy and letting other native believers die because of his “incorruption,” the missionary finally decided to be silent, accepting the arrangement of the government as being a Buddhist monk, never talking about Jesus Christ. What the Asian bishops had to deal with was such an environment. Sometimes, in some places, there were still occasions of life and death like this; sometimes it was the encounter with the Asian philosophers or religious people that brought the missionaries to astonishment and admiration. Endo seems to believe that even in silence, one still bears his witness of his belief, just like Jesus facing his trial and death without refuting. Similarly, Asian bishops were trying to persuade the Vatican authority that silence (in this case, explicit proclamation of Jesus as the only Savior) is not denying, but revealing, by their works on an Asian Catholic theology.

The other novel is “Deep River,” published in 1999. The story starts with a Japanese woman who tries to look for a friend in India who grew up with her and later on became a priest. When

she arrives there, she finds that he seems to be despised by other priests. It is because every day, this priest would carry those who were dying and too sick to get to the River Ganges, so that they may be reincarnated by the power of the river, which was a belief in Hinduism. This made him look like a pagan in the eyes of other priests, but that was the way of the priest to answer God's calling. This story deeply reflects Asian bishops' triple dialogue: with culture (the rites of death), with religion (Hinduism), and with the poor. Endo himself was a Japanese Catholic, and he was a profound thinker on these complicated issues of different religions. The Asian bishops regarded their tasks of inculturation as Jesus' incarnation, but the balance between one God and many, universal and locality still remains wrestled.

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