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## THEOLOGY OF HARMONY IN FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES (FABC) DOCUMENTS

### INTRODUCTION

As the FABC document *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony* states: “Young in its zest for life, ancient in its heritage, Asia is like a vast ocean where currents, undercurrents and cross-currents are constantly interacting above depths that remain calm. For in Asia we find a plurality of cultures and religions, churches and sects, types of societies and models of economic practices, variations of technologies, arts, sciences, philosophies and theologies in a diversity of races and languages”<sup>1</sup>.

All these have contributed to the complexities of life in Asia. Here one can observe the search for harmony, which appears “to constitute in a certain sense the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia”<sup>2</sup>.

Faced with socio-economic, cultural, and religious pluralism, which is without doubt the hallmarks of Asia more than of any other continent, the Asian bishops and theologians, especially in the documents of the Federation

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<sup>1</sup> Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (TAC/FABC). *Asian Christian Perspectives of Harmony* (Hong Kong, April 1995) (henceforth cited as ACPH) 1.1. In *For All Peoples of Asia* (henceforth cited as FAPA) 2 p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (OEIA/FABC). *Final Statement of the First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue* (henceforth cited as BIRA IV/1) 13. In FAPA 1 p. 249.

of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and its offices, have repeatedly suggested that the only effective way for the Church to carry out its mission of evangelization, including the proclamation of Jesus as the universal saviour, is dialogue. The FABC prescribes a triple dialogue: dialogue with the Asian peoples, especially their poor and marginalized (liberation and integral development); dialogue with the Asian cultures (inculturation); and dialogue with the Asian religions (interreligious dialogue)<sup>3</sup>.

The FABC's overarching vision of harmony is rooted in its firm belief that "there is an Asian approach to reality, a world-view, wherein the whole is the sum-total of the web of relationships and interaction of the various parts with each other, in a word, *harmony*, a word which resonates with all Asian cultures"<sup>4</sup>. For the FABC, the quest for harmony is its contribution to "the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures, and socio-political structures", because "in an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the church must in a special way be a sacrament—a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony"<sup>5</sup>. This call is especially prophetic today, in view of the occurrence of religious strife in many parts of Asia, e.g., the Hindu-Christian conflict in India and the Muslim-Christian conflict in Indonesia.

According to the FABC, the notion of harmony is well-placed to act as this common underlying foundation for communication amidst much diversity and pluralism because it is authentically Christian, yet quintessentially Asian. In this regard, BIRA V/2 presents the following understanding of harmony that speaks to both Christians and non-Christians alike:

Harmony can be perceived and realized at various levels: Harmony in oneself as personal integration of body and mind; harmony with the Cosmos, not only living in harmony with nature, but sharing nature's gift equitably to promote harmony among peoples; harmony with others, accepting, respecting, and appreciating each one's cultural, ethnic, and religious identity, building community in freedom and fellowship; harmony in our collaborations as a means of promoting harmony for all in the world; and finally harmony with God or the Absolute or whatever we perceive as the ultimate goal of life<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter C. P h a n. *Evangelization in a Culture of Pluralism Challenges and Opportunities*. Australian eJournal of Theology 9(2007).

<sup>4</sup> ACPH 6 p. 298.

<sup>5</sup> *Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium*, July 17-27, 1990, Bandung, Indonesia. FABC V, 4.2. In FAPA 1 p. 282.

<sup>6</sup> BIRA V/2. In FAPA 2 p. 151.

Indeed, the FABC speaks of the experience of harmony within an overarching and holistic vision of unity in the Asian milieu:

At the heart of our vision of life is the Asian reverential sense of mystery and of the sacred, a spirituality that regards life as sacred and discovers the Transcendent and its gifts even in mundane affairs, in tragedy or victory, in brokenness or wholeness. This deep interiority draws people to experience harmony and inner peace and infuses ethics into all of creation<sup>7</sup>.

### I. GENERAL VIEW OF THE THEOLOGY OF HARMONY<sup>8</sup>

The theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), viewed over a forty year period from 1970 to 2010, has been a development of great significance for the Churches in Asia, paralleling the more comprehensive event of Vatican II in its import for the whole Church. The FABC's theology is best understood in terms of the synthetic contextual model according to Stephen Bevans<sup>9</sup>.

Most of what the FABC has said on the other religions is found in the workshops conducted by the FABC Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), in particular the Bishops' Institute of Interreligious Affairs (BIRA) – activities that are intended to foster and deepen the Asian Churches' dialogue with others. It is worth noting that in the first series of workshops of the Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA I – BIRA IV/12)<sup>10</sup>, the participants were Christians (almost all of whom were bishops, discerning with one another the significance of religious pluralism in the light of the Christian faith) but the BIRA series on Harmony (BIRA V/1 – BIRA V/5)<sup>11</sup> involved persons of different faiths. In this sense, the BIRA V series

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<sup>7</sup> Final Statement of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly. *Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life*. In FAPA 2 p. 5. Cf. Jonathan Y u n - k a T a n. *A New Way of Being Church in Asia: The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at the Service of Life in Pluralistic Asia*. *Missiology: An International Review* 33(January 2005)1 p. 78-79.

<sup>8</sup> Herman P u n d a P a n d a. *Towards Living in Harmony. A Study of Interreligious Dialogue as an Effort to Promote Harmony among Believers of Various Religions. Based on the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Documents from 1970 to 1996*. Roma 2001 p. 49-65.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen B. B e v a n s. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Manila 2003 p. 3-9.

<sup>10</sup> FAPA 1 p. 109-123, 247-262, 299-334.

<sup>11</sup> FAPA 2 p. 143-171.

was truly an exercise of dialogue with the religious others and it produced documents that were truly interreligious<sup>12</sup>. Other significant FABC documents on other faiths are the theological reflections of the FABC's Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), formerly known as the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), in particular: "Asian Christian Perspective on Harmony"<sup>13</sup>, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today"<sup>14</sup> and "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology"<sup>15</sup>.

BIRA IV/10 was held in Sukubumi, Indonesia, June 24-30, 1988. At that meeting the participants began to reflect on the important theme that is the "Theology of Harmony"<sup>16</sup>. The participants of BIRA IV/10 were the delegates of the Bishops' Conferences of Indonesia, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Immediately afterwards, on July 1-7, they held in the same place BIRA IV/11 to continue reflecting on the same theme<sup>17</sup>. The participants of BIRA IV/11 came from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Taiwan – R.O.C. and Thailand. BIRA IV/12 took place Hua Hin, Thailand, February 21-26, 1991. At that meeting were present bishops, priest and laity from 11 Asian countries, the staff members and consultors of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the delegates from the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

In this three meeting the participants spoke about the importance of the Theology of Harmony in connection with the Asian situation of disharmony. They were aware of the role of Asian religions in creating peace and harmony, the concept of harmony in the Asian world-views and finally the Christian contribution to peace and harmony in Asia.

### Facing the Threats to Harmony in Asia

Facing these threats to life and to harmony in Asia, the participants affirmed that all human persons and communities are called to stand together in solidarity. They said: "Our very survival demands a transcending of social, ethnic and indeed religious boundaries. Those different faiths are summoned

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<sup>12</sup> Ruben C. M e n d o z a. *Ray of the Truth that Enlightens All. Nostra Aetate and Its Reception by the FABC*. Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 16(2006)2 p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> FAPA 2 p. 229-298.

<sup>14</sup> FAPA 3 p. 237-327.

<sup>15</sup> FAPA 3 p. 329-419.

<sup>16</sup> BIRA IV/10, 1. In FAPA 1 p. 313.

<sup>17</sup> BIRA IV/11, 2. In FAPA 1 p. 317.

to live and work together for a more human world. In other words they are summoned to a dialogue of life, a dialogue in a context of ordinary life, and which is the fullest sense for life"<sup>18</sup>. According to the participants, the violence and the threats to human life and to harmony in society demand of all people of good will to heal wounds, to restore broken peace and concord, to repair violated justice and honour<sup>19</sup>.

All the Asian religions must join together and on the basis of their fundamental teaching and of the cultural traditions of the people, they can encourage their members to become the defenders and guardians of human values.

### The Role of the Asian Religions for Peace and Harmony

The participants of BIRA IV/11 observed within the Asian peoples the potencies of peace and harmony, in spite of many conflicts and contradictions. Among Asian peoples there is a thirst for peace, for greater human dignity, brotherhood and equality<sup>20</sup>. Moreover the participants saw "the desire among peoples of various faiths to break down traditional barriers of division and hostility, and their initiative to reach out to neighbours of other faiths in a spirit of love, friendship, harmony and collaboration"<sup>21</sup>. Meanwhile in BIRA IV/12, the participants affirmed that "the religions of Asia have a crucial role to play in God's great enterprise to bring peace, communion and more human way of life to all peoples of Asia, indeed to the whole human family"<sup>22</sup>. The solidarity and working together of all peoples of different religions tend to create harmony which embodies the realities of order, well-being, justice and love as seen in human interaction and in respect for the earth. The participants of BIRA IV/11 named three common concerns to which all the religions in Asia should pay special attention. **Firstly**, they spoke about harmony with nature. According to the participants, the harmony and balance of natural environment in relation to the life of human beings is a fundamental one<sup>23</sup>. **Secondly**, they also spoke about human dignity and the recognition of pluralism. Peace and a just order in human relationships, in the family and in the socio-political sphere can be created when there is recognition of human dignity and rights, and the will to promote justice and

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<sup>18</sup> BIRA IV/12, III 12. In FAPA 1 p. 328.

<sup>19</sup> BIRA IV 19 p. 329.

<sup>20</sup> BIRA IV/11, II 4 p. 318.

<sup>21</sup> BIRA IV/11, II 5 p. 318.

<sup>22</sup> BIRA IV/12, 7 p. 326.

<sup>23</sup> BIRA IV/11, V 13 p. 320.

freedom<sup>24</sup>. Further, the participants attested that “peace and harmony in Asian societies, composed as they are of many cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups, would require recognition of a legitimate pluralism and respect for all groups. Unity, peace and harmony are to be realized indiversity”<sup>25</sup>. **Thirdly**, the participants finally spoke about interreligious harmony. Given the fact that the Asian religions have a powerful force to influence all aspects of people’s life, they can contribute to weld together peoples and nations and o create peace and harmony in Asian societies<sup>26</sup>.

Harmony in the Dialogue between Christianity and Each of the Great Asian Religions and Religious Traditions:

### *Hinduism*

Harmonious integration of the whole and the parts at all levels (cosmic, social and individual) marks the quintessence of the Hindu quest. The Hindu way and view of life, its ethos, values, goals, etc., are all permeated, coloured and governed by this ideal. At the cosmic level, the world is sustained by *rta* – a harmonious order which is necessary to maintain the general well-being of the entire reality (*lokasamgraha*).

Society is upheld by the order of *dharma* through which its various constituent parts are “held together”. An individual person on his/her part is maintained in proper order by truth (*satya*). All three orders (cosmic, social, individual) are mutually interdependent. It is to be noted here that the ethical or moral order is not something independent of this inner order of reality with its various levels and constituent parts. In fact, *dharma* means order as well as righteousness and justice. In the popular Hindu belief, if *dharma* is upheld, then nature will continue to flourish and yield fruits, whereas violating it (*adharma*) will bring the age of darkness (*kaliyuga*), with natural calamities and cataclysms.

Hinduism leads us then to the realization that the cosmic, social and moral order meet, blend and flow one into the other. For Hinduism, the harmonious order in which unity and plurality are blended together is not only inextricably bound to the ethical realm of justice, but in a way is its very source. Harmony is justice; even more, it is the source of justice<sup>27</sup>. The Third

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<sup>24</sup> BIRA IV/11, V 14 p. 320.

<sup>25</sup> BIRA IV/11, V 15 p. 321.

<sup>26</sup> BIRA IV/11, V 16 p. 321.

<sup>27</sup> ACPH 3.2.2 p. 259.

FABC Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA III), held in Madras, November 20, 1982, explains harmony as follows:

Wholeness and order may be said to characterize Hindu culture, especially in the various arts, in the *raga* (melody) and *tala* (rhythm), in the *karanas* (postures) and *mudras* (gestures and dance), and in the micro-cosmic profusion of temple architecture. This integral humanism goes beyond all dualism between body and soul, sacred and secular, person and world. The concept of *dharma* seeks to recreate this wholeness, tarnished by various alienations caused by *avidya* (ignorance), *anawa* (egoism) and *kama* (attachment). Contemporary socio-cultural and economic realities have strengthened this alienation<sup>28</sup>.

### *Buddhism*

The Buddha's teaching is contained in the Four Noble Truths (*arja satja*): there is suffering; there is a cause or origin of suffering; there is an end of suffering, and there is a path out of suffering. This is his Dharma: the ultimate truth towards which his life and experience point. Enlightenment consists in a direct, dynamic experience of this dharma brought about by following the "Eight-Fold Path", which culminates in intense meditation and contemplation.

At the core of Buddhism is the internal and external balance which should be a way of life. Isolated materialistic development is disastrous. Human development has to come first. *Dharma* is to be spread in all its aspects, and a holistic approach to development is needed<sup>29</sup>.

### *Islam*

"Harmony" in the Muslim community appears in the deliberation called Shura, deliberation or consultation, in which no one may impose his or her will on others, and which is to be protected until in one way or another those involved arrive at a decision agreed upon by all. The principle of a majority overruling opinions of minorities is rejected by many Muslims. In this common agreement, within the ideal of unity of the entire Muslim community, the opinion of the majority has to take account of that of the minority.

Another expression of "harmony" is found where religious plurality is recognized; where Muslims manifest desire for dialogue with people of other religious convictions, for a common forum in order to search together for the solution of common problems or to strive for common goals; or solidarity

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<sup>28</sup> BIRA III, 14. In FAPA 1 p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> ACPH 3.2.3 p. 260.

within humanity (*Ukhuwah basyariyah*), based on common needs and responsibility for universal well-being and for human dignity in general, the “environmental” aspect of religiosity.

Above all, Islam presents itself as inner submission to God. Islam recognizes that Christians too believe in God and give themselves to the service of God. The two religions come together in their understanding of the love and service of the neighbour. Islam and Christianity, therefore, find themselves on the road to reconciliation when they acknowledge that they are different and respect each other’s differences. They may not be able to accept each other’s doctrines and ways of worshipping and devotion, but the greatest thing is to have humility before God. We share a common humanity and our common search for God and his holy will. This was recognized at the end of the fifth series of FABC Bishops’ Institutes for Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA V/1), when it was stated that harmony would come when Muslims and Christians remain united to the will of God for humankind and creation as found in the Qur’an and the New Testament<sup>30</sup>.

### *Chinese Traditions*

Harmony is understood as Means and Ideal in Chinese Life. In the ancient Chinese military strategy there was a saying known by everyone and still used today which means: to achieve a victory there are three factors listed in an ascendant way: *Tien-shih, Dili, Jenhe* – “good weather, advantageous locality, human harmony”. The message of the phrase is: the harmony among ourselves is decisive in a war. In family life the Chinese say: *Jia he wang shi hen* – “when there is harmony in a family, everything will prosper”. And in personal relationships it is said: *he wei gwei* – “harmony is the most precious thing”. The shortcomings caused by this mentality of preserving harmony at all costs are: lack of a critical spirit, unwillingness to accept realities full of tensions and contrasts, resignation to the factual situation in order to save the minimal level of life. All this points to a much-needed correction to the concept of harmony, without renouncing its vitality which has served the vast Chinese population so well for so many centuries.

Above and beyond the ordinary folk, who constitute the great majority of the Chinese people, there are several philosophical and religious currents

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<sup>30</sup> ACPH 3.2.4 p. 260-262.



which articulate the people's feelings and thoughts. Within these currents harmony is coupled with "joy"<sup>31</sup>.

## II. THE PROSPECT OF HARMONY IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE FABC

### *BIRA Meetings:*

Between 1992 and 1996 the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs organized a series of meetings (BIRA V/1-5), which dealt with the harmony in the dialogue between Christianity and the great Asian religions and religious traditions. This series of meetings could be considered as a new start, in the fact that the participants were representatives of their respective faiths: Christianity, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists and Confucians.

Only to mentioned statements of meetings and dialogues:

– Christians-Muslims: BIRA V/1: *Working Together for Harmony in God's World* (October 19-24, 1992, Multan, Islamic Republic of Pakistan)<sup>32</sup> and *Harmony among Believers of Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia* (Pattaya, Thailand, August 1-5, 1994)<sup>33</sup> (this seminar was organized by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and opened by cardinal Francis Arinze, president of PCID,

– Christians-Buddhists: BIRA V/2: *Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World* (Pattaya, Thailand, April 25-29, 1994)<sup>34</sup>,

– Christians-Hindus: BIRA V/3 (New Delhi, India, October 24-28, 1995)<sup>35</sup>,

– Christians-Confucianists and Taoists: BIRA V/4: *Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia: Christians in Dialogue with Confucian Thought and Taoist Spirituality* (Taiwan R.O.C., April 15-19, 1996)<sup>36</sup>,

– BIRA V/5: *Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue (Evaluation of the BIRA V Encounters)*, Bali, Indonesia, 27 October – 1 November 1996<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> ACPH 3.2.5 p. 262-263.

<sup>32</sup> BIRA V/1. In FAPA 2 p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> OEIA/FABC. *Harmony among Believers of Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia* (Thailand, August 5, 1994). In FAPA 2 p. 174.

<sup>34</sup> BIRA V/2, 1. 1. In FAPA 2 p. 149.

<sup>35</sup> BIRA V/3, 2. In FAPA 2 p. 156.

<sup>36</sup> BIRA V/4, 1. In FAPA 2 p. 161.

<sup>37</sup> OEIA/FABC. *Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue (Evaluation of the BIRA V Encounters)*. Final Report of Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Scholars of Confucian and Taoist Traditions in Dialogue (Bali, Indonesia, November 1, 1996). In FAPA 2 p. 167-171.

*Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*

A document of the FABC Theological Advisory Commission dated Hong Kong, April 1995, presents an extensive reflection on the *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*<sup>38</sup>. Although this document often quotes FABC documents, it is not only a recapitulation of the previous reflections on the theology of harmony. After studying in depth the challenges to harmony in Asia (chapter I, the attempts at promoting harmony by the Asian peoples (chapter II), the TAC/FABC tries to explore the teaching of Asian religions including biblical perspectives on harmony (chapter III). Then in chapter IV it presents the orientation of the Church in Asia towards harmony. Finally in chapter V, the document speaks about how harmony can be put into practice. The TAC/FABC document describes the biblical perspectives on harmony with a simple scheme: original harmony in creation, restoration of harmony in Christ, and the Church and harmony<sup>39</sup>.

The source of Theology of Dialogue and the basic concepts of harmony mentioned above are not foreign to Christianity. There are some paradigms of harmony in Sacred Scriptures and the Church's Magisterium. Urged by the impulse of the Vatican Council II and some post Vatican Council II Church's documents, the Church in Asia seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the Kingdom of God and the Theology of the Spirit. The Kingdom of God is far wider than the Church and its values can also be found outside the Church. Likewise the Holy Spirit is active in and beyond the visible boundaries of Church, rendering possible that Christ saves the followers of other living faiths. These new understandings of the Kingdom of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit enable Christians to enter into even deeper dialogue with the peoples other religions in Asia<sup>40</sup>.

The TAC/FABC describes the basic concept of Christian perspectives of harmony as follows: 1) the creation of the world is the victory of harmony over chaos, 2) this original harmony is destroyed by the sin of human beings, 3) however God wanted to restore the harmony of creation in Christ, from the very moment when disharmony was introduced into this world. God's work of restoring harmony is carried out through God's covenant with the people of Israel and finally finds its fulfilment in Christ. Christ proclaimed the Kingdom of God, the reality of peace and harmony in the world. Through

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<sup>38</sup> ACPH 1.1 p. 233.

<sup>39</sup> ACPH 3.3 p. 266-277. Cf. P u n d a P a n d a. *Towards Living in Harmony* p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> P u n d a P a n d a. *Towards Living in Harmony* p. 64.

His Paschal Mystery, Christ has reconciled the human beings with God, freed them from sin and made them children of God. Besides that, through His Paschal Mystery, Christ has brought reconciliation among all mankind because in Him they become brothers and sisters and children of the same Father. He realizes all that through His Church, the sacrament of Kingdom of God and its harmony.

*Methodology:*

Indeed, in Asia, each local Church has to confront a different set of issues when it seeks to dialogue with its local cultures, religions and the poor. Their starting point for reflection on Christian faith is the variety of contextually conditioned experiences, which themselves dictate a theological pluralism. Since their first gathering in 1970 the Asian bishops have encouraged this pluralism in theology<sup>41</sup>. In their view, pluralism is a “positive and creative sign” that “unity is deeper than whatever the concrete technical analysis or viewpoints might show. Pluralism also gives the advantageous value of complementarity”<sup>42</sup>. The bishops affirm “a stance of receptive pluralism” recognising „the fact that people encounter the Spirit within their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, culture and worldviews”<sup>43</sup>. For them, “it is important to cultivate an all-embracing and complementary way of thinking”, as it is “very characteristic of Asian traditions” to “consider the various dimensions of reality not as contradictory, but as complementary (*yin/yang*)”<sup>44</sup>. They also recognise the “insufficiency of current human expressions” of the Christian faith, and “such insufficiency allows for pluralism in theology”<sup>45</sup>. In their view, diversity “represents richness and strength” and “the test of true harmony lies in the acceptance of diversity as richness”<sup>46</sup>. Harmony, they affirm, embodies “the realities of order, well-being, justice and love as seen in human interaction”<sup>47</sup>. They believe that “there is an Asian approach to reality, a world-view, wherein the whole is the sum-total of the web of relationships and interaction of the various parts with each other, in a word, harmony, a word which resonates with all Asian cul-

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<sup>41</sup> OTC. Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, 1. 4. In FAPA 3 p. 336.

<sup>42</sup> BISA II, 10. In FAPA 1 p. 204-205.

<sup>43</sup> BIRA IV/3, 16. In FAPA 1 p. 261.

<sup>44</sup> BIRA IV/11, 20. In FAPA 1 p. 322.

<sup>45</sup> OTC. Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, 1.5 p. 337.

<sup>46</sup> BIRA IV/11, 20 p. 321.

<sup>47</sup> BIRA IV/10, 4 p. 313-314.

tures”<sup>48</sup>. According to the FABC, “one of the serious obstacles to harmony is the attitude of exclusivity”, and “the failure to view the complementarity which exists between peoples, cultures, faiths, ideologies, world-visions, etc.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, they conclude that some of the common, national and regional problems that the nations of Asia face today are due to a lack of harmony.

The FABC first discussed the theme of harmony in 1984, stating that “harmony seems to constitute in a certain sense the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia”<sup>50</sup>. Hence, there is an imperative for a study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context, which could lead to interreligious dialogue<sup>51</sup>. For the bishops, “scripture offers a pluriformity of models for harmony: Creation, Covenant, People of God, and Kingdom of God. Although all four models contain the dynamics of God's presence, the Kingdom of God is the core of Christ's proclamation and embodies the first three”, and “provides the most action-oriented model for fostering harmony within society”<sup>52</sup>. However the FABC stresses that „the promotion of harmony and commitment to action is not the preserve of the small Christian community of Asia”<sup>53</sup>. As it is a common task, Christians should “strive for a holistic realization of harmony together with others”, including the resources of other faiths to “achieve mutual enrichment”<sup>54</sup>. The FABC is “committed to the emergence of the Asianness of the Church in Asia. This means that the Church has to be an embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially interiority, harmony, a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life”<sup>55</sup>. It is clear, then, the transition from a Eurocentric theology to a plurality of theologies in an Asian context has taken place. In the process, it has started a “paradigm shift” in theology<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> ACPH 6 p. 298.

<sup>49</sup> BIRA IV/11, 20 p. 322.

<sup>50</sup> BIRA IV/1, 13. In FAPA 1 p. 249.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> BIRA IV/10, 6. In FAPA 1 p. 314.

<sup>53</sup> ACPH 6 p. 298.

<sup>54</sup> BIRA IV/10, 5 p. 314.

<sup>55</sup> A Renewed Church In Asia: A Mission Of Love And Service. The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Samphan, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000. In FAPA 3 p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Peter N. V. H a i. *Fides Querens Dialogum: Theological Methodologies of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*. Australian eJournal of Theology 8(2006).

Theological Advisory Commission of FABC suggests, among others, such thesis about dialogue:

1) In the developing, multireligious societies of Asia, struggling towards liberation and wholeness, all religions are called to provide a common and complementary moral and religious foundation for this struggle, and be forces for growth and communion rather than sources of alienation and conflict. They can do this only through dialogue and collaboration. The religions have a prophetic role in public life.

2) Dialogue with other religions, which are significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation, is an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, which is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. In Asia today, Christians, though they are a "little flock" in many places, animated by the Spirit who is leading all things to unity, are called to play a serving and catalyzing role which facilitates inter-religious collaboration. This call challenges all the churches to common witness as they grow together towards fuller ecumenical communion<sup>57</sup>.

The document of the Office of Theological Concerns of the FABC *Methodology: Asian Christian Theology. Doing Theology in Asia Today* is a fruit of the work of study and consultation of the commission OTC and of other theologians over a period of three years, finally approved in their meeting in Kathmandu, May 2000. In introduction we can read:

Given the overriding value of harmony, Asian Christians will be looking for ways to integrate the experiences of Asia, the experience of their own forebears, and hence of their own psyche, into their Christian faith. The Asian way is one of integration and inclusion. Rather than saying: "A is true, so B must be false", the Asian tends to say "A is true, and B is also true in some sense". This is not to say that truth is relative. There is but one Truth; but Truth is a Mystery which we approach reverently, while we try to seek to understand its various aspects and dimensions. Hence, the Asian Christian is open to dialogue, a dialogue based on profound respect for individuals, communities and their religious traditions<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Seven Theses on Interreligious Dialogue: An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection. International Bulletin of Missionary Research, July 1989 p. 109.

<sup>58</sup> OTC. Methodology: Asian Christian Theology p. 331.

## CONCLUSION

In the FABC documents harmony is recognized as the ideal of life of the Asian peoples. On the other hand, there is an awareness of the phenomenon of disharmony comprises human current Asian situation. This phenomenon of disharmony comprises human relationships and the relation between human beings and nature. In Asia, there are forces of fragmentation and division in human relationship, linked to the instability of the socio-political order. There are exploitations of the environment, which destroy precious resources and thus destroy the material and spiritual habitat of many Asian peoples<sup>59</sup>.

The documents, however, present also the Asian peoples' endeavours to harmony and peace. As harmony is the ideal of life of Asian peoples, there have been various attempts at promoting harmony, in facing the unwanted realities of disharmony. Likewise the Church in Asia seeks to make a contribution to the Asian peoples' endeavours to harmony. Therefore, the FABC has urged the construction of a Theology of Harmony in the Asian context, in which interreligious harmony is one of its important aspects. For this purpose, the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BIRA) sponsored a series of meetings in which the Theology of Dialogue and Theology of Harmony were discussed.

The aim of interreligious dialogue is to foster harmony among believers of different religions, in the midst of the Asian situation of disharmony. As a matter of fact, the basic concepts of harmony can be found in each of the Asian religions and religious traditions, although within each of them it developed specific connotations and nuances. In short, all of them consider the importance of harmony in the human person, in human relationship, harmony with nature and with God or the Absolute or whatever is perceived as the ultimate goal of human life.

These documents present the commitment of the FABC to interreligious dialogue and the vision on harmony in the Asian religions and cultural traditions, as well as in Christian teachings. The FABC is very much aware of the challenges to harmony in Asia, although it also believes that the visions on harmony in Asian religions and cultures can be brought into reality and at once become the forces to counter these challenges to harmony. So, dialogue as a paradigm for Church theological and pastoral activity is fulfil with criterion of harmony. In this effort, the Church in collaboration with other reli-

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<sup>59</sup> P u n d a P a n d a. *Towards Living in Harmony* p. 64.

gions can play an important role, that is, to transform the Asian societies towards the realization of the Kingdom of God.

#### Abbreviations

- ACPH – Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony  
 BIRA – Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs  
 BISA – Bishops' Institute for Social Action  
 FABC – Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences  
 FAPA 1 – For All the Peoples of Asia. Vol. I. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991. Edited by G. B. Rosalees and C. G. Arevalo. Manila 1987.  
 FAPA 2 – For All the Peoples of Asia. Vol. II. The FABC Documents from 1992 to 1996. Edited by F.-J. Eilers SVD. Manila 1997.  
 FAPA 3 – For All the Peoples of Asia. Vol. III. The FABC Documents from 1997 to 2001. Edited by F.-J. Eilers SVD. Manila 2002.  
 FAPA 4 – For All the Peoples of Asia. Vol. IV. The FABC Documents from 2002-2006. Edited by F.-J. Eilers SVD. Manila 2007.  
 OEIA – Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.  
 OTC – Office of Theological Concerns.

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## THEOLOGY OF HARMONY IN FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES (FABC) DOCUMENTS

### S u m m a r y

This paper presents a new perspective on theology, especially the theology of religions, proposed by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The key concept is the harmony, striving toward which firmly inscribed in the religious concepts of Asian philosophical point of view. Understanding of harmony was outlined in the Eastern religions and the perception in the perspective of redemption in Jesus Christ and His Church. Shown are a number of documents and initiatives of FABC that refer to the idea of harmony as a common



denominator for Asian theology. Triple form of dialogue (with the poor, with the culture and interreligious) selected as a criterion of activities of the Church in Asia seems to be most fully understood and implemented with a view of harmony.

**Key words:** Harmony, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Asian theology, Eastern religions, inculturation, theology of religions, interreligious dialogue, new paradigm for theology.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Harmonia, Federacja Konferencji Episkopatów Azji (FABC), teologia azjatycka, religie Wschodu, inkulturacja, teologia religii, dialog międzyreligijny, paradygmat teologii.

## TEOLOGIA HARMONII W DOKUMENTACH FEDERACJI KONFERENCJI EPISKOPATÓW AZJI (FABC)

### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł prezentuje nowe spojrzenie na teologię, zwłaszcza teologię religii, proponowane przez Federację Konferencji Episkopatów Azji (FABC). Kluczowym pojęciem jest w nim harmonia, dążenie ku której mocno wpisane jest w religijne koncepcje światopoglądowe Azji. Naszkicowane zostało rozumienie harmonii w religiach Wschodu oraz postrzeganie w jej perspektywie zbawczego dzieła Jezusa Chrystusa i Kościoła. Ukazane zostały liczne dokumenty i inicjatywy FABC, które odwołują się do idei harmonii jako wspólnego mianownika dla teologii azjatyckiej. Potrójna forma dialogu (z ubogimi, międzykulturowego i międzyreligijnego) wybrana za podstawowe kryterium działań Kościoła w Azji wydaje się najpełniej rozumiana i realizowana w perspektywie harmonii.