



The ‘Other Hand Of God,’ The Church, and Other Religious Traditions in the FABC’s Reflections

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For the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), the Holy Spirit appears to serve as a key in understanding and interpreting other religious traditions and how the Church is to relate with their followers. The Asian bishops consistently affirm that the Holy Spirit is actively present in other religions and that these religions contain expressions and practices that are inspired and prompted by the Spirit. This is why these manifestations of the Spirit’s presence demands critical discernment and that these must be in dialogue with the Spirit’s activity in the Church. In and through this the Spirit’s manifold works within and outside the Church, the Church is not only enriched but is enabled to understand more fully the reality of religious pluralism as God’s gift to the Church and the world.

Keywords: *Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Holy Spirit, interreligious dialogue, discernment, Church, Kingdom of God*

A particular emphasis of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' (FABC)¹ theology of religions is the presence and activity of the Spirit in other religious traditions.² It is apparent that the Asian bishops consider the Spirit as a key in understanding God's plan of salvation – a design which is not confined to only the Christian community but also involves all peoples and the rest of creation.³ In this five-part paper, I will expound on theological issues related to the FABC's pneumatological theology of religions. First, I will discuss the universal presence of the Spirit in the world and its particular presence in other religions. Second, I will highlight the role of the Spirit in the FABC's understanding of the Church's nature and mission. Third, I will expound on the FABC's criteria for the discernment of the Spirit in interreligious relations. Fourth, I will expound on the FABC's understanding of discernment in relation with other traditions. And lastly, I will tackle the FABC's interpretation of the relationship between the Jesus and the Spirit.

¹ The FABC is a voluntary organization of the different episcopal conferences in Asia. It aims to foster episcopal solidarity and the cooperation of the different local churches in Asia in responding to the needs of their people(s). The FABC's documents are found in the following: Catalino Arévalo and Gaudencio Rosales, eds. *For All the Peoples in Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970-1991*, vol. 1 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992); Franz-Josef Eilers SVD, ed., *For All the Peoples in Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1991-1996*, vol. 2. (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997); Eilers, *For All the Peoples in Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1997-2001*, vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002); Eilers, *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 2002 to 2006*, vol. 4 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2007). Henceforth, these books will be referred to as FAPA I, FAPA II, FAPA III, and FAPA IV, respectively. In the text, the various FABC statements will be referred to by their abbreviation, a list of which is provided at the end of this essay.

² For different perspectives and studies on the FABC's theology of religions, cf. Edmund Chia, *Towards a Theology of Dialogue: Schillebeeckx's Method as Bridge between Vatican's Dominus Iesus and Asia's FABC Theology* (Ph.D. Diss. Nijmegen, The Netherlands: University of Nijmegen, 2003); Ruben C. Mendoza, *A Church in Dialogue with peoples of Other Faiths: A Journey to the Kingdom in the Spirit (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences 1970-2007)* (Ph.D/S.T.D. Diss., Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009); and Nguyen Thien Throng, *Interreligious Dialogue: Reading the Teachings of the Vatican and the Statements of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in the Context of Australia* (M.A. thesis. Melbourne: Melbourne College of Divinity, 2008).

³ For recent FABC studies on the Spirit's presence and role in the church, cf. Laurence Abraham Kadaliyil, *Toward a Relational Spirit Ecclesiology in Asia: A Study of the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (Th.D. Diss., Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union, 2006); Davis Varayilan, *Pilgrim Church and the Holy Spirit: A Comparative Study of the Pneumatological Ecclesiology of Cardinal Yves Congar and the FABC Documents (1970-2005)* (S.T.D. Diss. Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 2006); and Albertus Bagus Laksana, *The Spirit at Work: Asian Pneumatology from Below and the Problem of Religious Pluralism* (STL Thesis, Cambridge: Weston Jesuit School of Theology, 2005). For a comparison of the FABC's and Gavin D'Costa's pneumatological theology of religions, cf. Ruben C. Mendoza, "Religious Pluralism and Turn to the Spirit," *Journal of Dharma* 35 (2010): 23-38. For interreligious dialogue in the context of the Philippines, cf. the impressive study of William LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace: The Local Church of Mindanao-Sulu Journeying in Dialogue with the Muslim Community (1965-2000)* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2001); see pages 309-24 for his discussion of the FABC's teaching on dialogue.

The Universal Presence of the Spirit and Its Particular Presence in Other Religions

For the Asian bishops, God is universally present in creation⁴ and confers on it God's blessings. The bishops situate the story of humankind, which "with its rich variety of peoples and races is called to move towards unity as their ultimate goal, transcending all divisions, conflicts and strifes [sic] caused by sin,"⁵ within the context of God's creation. Importantly for the bishops, Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God "embodies God's plan for creation. For, it points to the gathering of all peoples and nations into one family as brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of God."⁶ The attainment of this goal occurs not apart from but in the concrete realities of life, which for FABC Fifth Plenary Assembly (FABC V) are "the context of God's creative, incarnational and redemptive action, the theatre in which the drama of God's salvation is enacted."⁷ It is through the travails and vicissitudes of life, among others, that God speaks to Christians and bids them to renew their sense of mission.⁸ Present in the Spirit, who "is everywhere bringing the whole of humankind into the fullness of life and the glory of the children of God,"⁹ God expects "our partnership and collaboration in the shaping and reshaping of human history and human destiny."¹⁰ The FABC senses in the contextual realities of Asia "the stirrings of the creative Spirit, a Spirit sometimes disturbing, but ever surprising, challenging and hope-giving."¹¹ For the Asian bishops,

Where the sick are healed, the hungry are fed, and captives set free, where individuals and communities are reconciled and nations live in peace and cooperate with one another, we see the hand of God at work. He is also at work in science, technology and culture where these serve the welfare of humankind.¹²

It is in and through the Spirit that God is at work in the world. Moreover, the FABC has "a general sense of God at work in the world through the activities

⁴ International Congress on Mission (ICM), Workshop III, 3, in FAPA I, 141.

⁵ Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/11), 8, in FAPA I, 319.

⁶ BIRA IV/11, 9, in FAPA I, 9.

⁷ FABC V, 1.5, in FAPA I, 275.

⁸ See FABC V, 3.0, in FAPA I, 279; First Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs (FIRA I), 2.3, in FAPA I, 292.

⁹ Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), "The Spirit at Work," 3.1, in FAPA III, 281.

¹⁰ Third Bishops' Institute for Social Action, 5, in FAPA I, 208.

¹¹ FABC V, 2.3.8, in FAPA I, 279. See also ICM, 12, in FAPA I, 129-30 for signs of the Spirit's activity in the Church, an observation which FABC Third Plenary Assembly (FABC III) makes its own (FABC III, 11.1-11.7, in FAPA I, 59).

¹² Conference Message, Asian Ecumenical Conference for Development, Tokyo, 22 July 1970, quoted in Asian Bishops' Meeting, 22, in FAPA I, 6.

and dedication of people – both Christian and non-Christian – committed to the creation of a new society...,”¹³ particularly among the poor.¹⁴ It is the Spirit who brings about a new creation, moulding the world according to the salvific plan of God.¹⁵ It is the Spirit who acts in freedom and whose actions cannot be reduced to persons, traditions, institutions or problems of relationships.¹⁶

In a particular way, the Spirit is present and active in other religious traditions.¹⁷ This is the implicit theological assumption of the FABC’s discernment of the “rays of truth” in other traditions: “The Spirit’s actions, His presence and ministry can – and must be – discerned both in other religions and even in secular movements that may be shaped [by] and leading to the Kingdom of God.”¹⁸ Echoing the teaching of Vatican II, the Asian bishops believe that God gives the grace of salvation to peoples of other faiths. It is the Spirit that is the point of encounter between humans and God: “The Holy Spirit, in ways known to God, gives to all human persons the opportunity of coming into contact with the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, and thus obtain salvation.”¹⁹ The indispensable activity of the Spirit in their lives and traditions is therefore crucial to their salvation. In other words, without the Spirit, there can be no salvation for them.²⁰ Hence, the Spirit in other religious tradition has a role in them that is analogous to its role in the Church.

This leads us to the next point, which is the FABC’s understanding of the Spirit’s role in the life and mission of the Church.

¹³ Second Bishops’ Institute for Social Action, 3, in FAPA I, 203. Cf. FABC Eighth Plenary Assembly (FABC VIII), 1; and “Living the Eucharist in Asia: FABC Ninth Plenary Assembly,” (FABC IX) FABC Papers No. 129 (2009), 4, <http://www.fabc.org/plenary%20assembly/FABC%20IX%20PA%20Final%20Document.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2011).

¹⁴ See Fifth Bishops’ Institute for Social Action, 10, in FAPA I, 218; Bishops’ Institute for Social Action (BISA VII), 9, in FAPA I, 231; BISA VII, 11, in FAPA I, 231; BISA VII, 20, in FAPA I, 233. Cf. also S. Devaraj, “Dialogue with the Poor in the FABC Documents,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 71 (2007): 645-62.

¹⁵ See Tenth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/10), 8, in FAPA I, 314.

¹⁶ First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/1), 10, in FAPA I, 249.

¹⁷ See Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA II), 12, in FAPA I, 115; Third Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA III), 2, in FAPA I, 119; Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia (CCPMA), 8, in FAPA I, 166; Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/7), in 12, in FAPA I, 310.

¹⁸ First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/1), 10, in FAPA I, 249. For the FABC’s discernment of the Spirit in other religions, cf. Mendoza, Ruben C., “Ray of Truth That Enlightens All’: *Nostra Aetate* and Its Reception by the FABC,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 16 (2006): 148-72.

¹⁹ Conclusions of the Theological Consultation, 49, in FAPA I, 346. This is an echo of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*, 22, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

²⁰ For that matter, this is also true for Christians. It is in and through the Spirit that a Christian receives the gift and task of salvation.

“A New Way of Being Church” and the Spirit

At the heart of the Church's assertion that the Spirit is present and active in the world, particularly in other religious traditions, and that the Christian community is called to discern the Spirit's presence in them, is the intimate relationship that exists between the Spirit and the Church. It is when one looks at this relationship that one can better understand and appreciate the FABC's assertions on the presence and role of the Spirit in others. Thus, this section focuses on how the FABC conceives of this relationship and how this is related to the Spirit's presence outside the Church. At the outset, it is important to remember that the FABC's reflections on the Spirit in other religions is to be understood in the broader framework of the bishops' reflection on what it means to be Church in Asia, which is the primary concern of the FABC. It is apparent that the FABC's reflections on different theological and pastoral issues flow from its understanding of a “new way of being Church in Asia.”²¹ I will present what this ecclesiology means for the bishops and, in the process, highlight the pneumatological dimension of this way of looking at the Church. The principal features of this “new way” are presented in three FABC documents, Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (ACMC) (1977), the FABC Third Plenary Assembly (1982), and FABC V (1990), while the pneumatological element is highlighted in the FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly (FABC VI).

Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church. The ACMC was organized as part of the Asian Church's effort to be a more effective sacrament of salvation in Asia and also as a response to the invitation of the Vatican to reflect on and, if need be, establish new ministries that might be deemed necessary or useful in Asia.²² After a presentation of the Asian situation and of its vision of things to come, the ACMC reflects on the Church's mission in Asia, as follows:

The Spirit of the Lord is present to our Churches, calling them to continue His service to the world. He calls them to become, each in its own context, the embodiment of His own self-emptying and self-giving, that from death new life may arise. The Spirit urges them to renew their self-understanding and to project a new image, to read the signs of the times as signs addressed to them by the Lord Himself, to be discerned through the Spirit as signs of His own active presence in the world and understood as

²¹ For an insightful discussion of this “new way of being Church,” cf. Jeffrey G.L. Chang, *Communion and Spiritual Leadership in Asia: Ordained Ministry in the Mission and Ministry of the Church in Asia in Light of the Documents of the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences 1970-2005* (Documenta Missionalia 33) (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2008), 95-123.

²² See ACMC, 1-5, in FAPA I, 67-68.

part of His saving design, operative even today in our midst. In our desire to renew our vision of the Church's mission we turn to Jesus Himself.²³

... To follow Him means dying to oneself for the sake of the gospel – a Gospel which announces that the Spirit stirs people to preach the good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, give sight to the blind and liberate those who are oppressed (Lk 4:18).²⁴

Established as Lord and Christ when His Father raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:36), Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on His disciples by whose power they would become His witnesses (Acts 2:8). It is this gift of the Holy Spirit that brought the Church into existence – a Church that would endure to the end of time and carry her mission to all the corners of the earth (LG 4). The Church, as a pilgrim people, continues the mission of Christ Himself, so she must conform to the model of humble service set by the Master... The Church, then, is a communion in the Spirit, a community of sharing and fellowship, of witness and service.²⁵

Moreover, this “communion in the Spirit” has to fulfill its mission in each particular situation and culture, that is, it needs to be truly incarnated in its own context – to be truly local²⁶ and “truly Asian in all things.”²⁷ A local church, in its discernment of what ministries and ministerial structures are needed in its context, “needs to become fully responsible and must have legitimate autonomy which her natural and harmonious growth demands.”²⁸ For the ACMC, the Spirit that gifted the early Church with various modes of organizational and ministerial structures enables present-day churches to creatively respond in constructing models of service that are truly responsive to the needs of their people.²⁹ In being responsible for its own growth and development, a local church “will be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit whose promptings they must follow in fidelity and loyalty to their vocation and to the Lord”³⁰ and will live in communion with other local churches, a bond of union that is “the guarantee of the true apostolicity and catholicity of each local church.”³¹

²³ Ibid., 21, in FAPA I, 71-72. Stephen Bevan's unpacking of Martin Luther's claim that the proper work of the Spirit is to make the church is quite relevant to this text of the ACMC. For Bevan, the Spirit calls, equips and challenges the church to be a missionary church (Stephen Bevan, SVD, “The Church as Creation of the Spirit: Unpacking a Missionary Images,” *Missiology: An International Review* 35 (2007): 5-21).

²⁴ ACMC, 22, in FAPA I, 72.

²⁵ ACMC, 23, in FAPA I, 72. Cf. also FABC VIII, 60, in FAPA IV, 23; Faith Encounters in Social Action IV in FAPA IV, 84; Asia Integral Pastoral Approach 4th General Assembly, 2.1, in FAPA IV, 180.

²⁶ ACMC, 24, in FAPA I, 72. Cf. also Fifth Formation Institute for inter-religious Affairs (FIRA V), 9, in FAPA IV, 199.

²⁷ ACMC, 26, in FAPA I, 72.

²⁸ ACMC, 25, in FAPA I, 72.

²⁹ See ACMC, 28, in FAPA I, 73.

³⁰ ACMC, 26, in FAPA I, 73.

³¹ ACMC, 27, in FAPA I, 73. Cf. FABC IX, 14.

In these reflections, the ACMC attributes two basic roles to the Spirit in relation to the Church. First, the Spirit, who was sent by Jesus to his disciples and is present in the Church is what constitutes the Church, thus, making it a “communion in the Spirit.” The Spirit continues to “gift” and inspire the Church with charisms and ministries and constantly renews it so that it may serve its peoples in a truly meaningful way. And second, the Spirit impels the Church to mission and ministry – to continue Christ’s mission of service, to embody his kenosis, to read and discern the signs of the times, to preach the Gospel to the *anawim*, and to witness to him.³² In other words, it is the Spirit that inspires, strengthens and accompanies Christians and Christian communities as they embody in their lives, and witness to Jesus’ presence and meaning to the world in the concrete circumstances of their lives. In this light, mission is thus understood by the FABC as the continuation³³ of, and a participation³⁴ in, the mission of Christ and a living in his Spirit,³⁵ as the Church journeys with their Asian neighbours on the way to the Kingdom³⁶ – an activity that demands a dialogue with Asian realities, a discernment of God’s Spirit in them, and a response to the promptings of the Spirit manifested in them.³⁷

FABC Third Plenary Assembly. FABC III was a reflection on the theme, “The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia.” It neatly summarizes the “constants in the being and mission of the Church, in its concrete realizations, ecclesial communities implanted in particular times and places,”³⁸ in the following text:

³² For a survey of the relationship between the Spirit and mission in the writings of Elizabeth Johnson, Stephen Bevans, Robert Schreiter, Jacques Dupuis, Leonardo Boff, José Comblin and Jürgen Moltmann, see Susan Smith, RNDM, “The Holy Spirit and Mission in Some Contemporary Theologies of Mission,” *Mission Studies* 18 (2001): 87-112.

³³ Cf. FABC V, 3.1.2, in FAPA I, 280.

³⁴ Cf. Sixth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/6), 5, in FAPA I, 304.

³⁵ FABC IV, 4.8.3, in FAPA I, 195.

³⁶ Cf. Second CCA-FABC Joint Ecumenical Formation (JEF II), 3, in FAPA IV, 190; FIRA V, 9, in FAPA IV, 199; Symposium on “Evangelization In Light of Ecclesia in Asia,” 13, in FAPA IV, 252. For a comparison and contrast of the FABC’s and Paul Knitter’s regnocentric theology of religions, cf. Ruben C. Mendoza, “Regnocentrism in the Theology of Religions in the FABC and Paul Knitter: Discerning Convergences and Divergences,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 19 (2009): 167-78.

³⁷ FABC V, 7.1, in FAPA I, 284. This process of three D’s – dialogue, discernment and deeds – actually follows a methodology that the FABC consistently employs in doing theology. See Antonio Lambino, “Dialogue, Discernment, Deeds: An Approach to Asian Challenges Today,” *FABC Papers* No. 56 (1990); also Jonathan Tan, “Theologizing at the Service of Life: The Contextual Theological Methodology of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences,” *Gregorianum* 83 (2000): 541-75; Peter N.V. Hai, “*Fides Quarens Dialogum*: Theological Methodologies of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences,” *Australian EJournal of Theology* 8 (October 2006), http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_8/hai.htm (accessed 20 January 2011); and James H. Kroeger, “Dialogue: Interpretative Key for the Life of the Church in Asia,” *FABC Papers* No. 130 (2010).

³⁸ FABC III, 7, in FAPA I, 56.

... the local church must be a *community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity, a community of prayer and of contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist*. It must be defined by its *life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel*, patterned on the paschal mystery of Jesus, “a community for others.” *It must strive to live and act under the constant guidance and power of the Spirit*. We have realized that genuine participation and co-responsibility must be essential elements of its existence, and theological reflection and *discernment* integral components of its life. It is a community which strives to remain in unfeigned unity with its pastors, within the bonds of local and universal communion in the one Church. It is called to give witness to the meanings and values it professes, incarnating these in the ways of life of its own people, expressing them in its presence, dialogue and praxis in all the spheres of its activity as Church in history, within its own real world. Finally, it constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father.³⁹

Moreover, FABC III affirms two things that other FABC gatherings have repeatedly pointed out. First, a local church realizes its being Church in the concrete realities of the lives of its peoples. Since it is confronted with situations marked by injustice and oppression, Christian discipleship in Asia then demands an active engagement in integral human development.⁴⁰ Second, for the bishops, it is clear that

... *our Christian communities in Asia must listen to the Spirit at work in many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history, and that they (as communities of the Gospel) must accompany these others “in a common pilgrimage toward the ultimate goal, in relentless quest for the Absolute,” and thus they are to be “sensitively attuned to the work of the Spirit in the resounding symphony of Asian communion.”*⁴¹

This point appears to restate a similar assertion made by the bishops of FABC II:

Sustained and reflective dialogue with them [other religions] in prayer (as shall be found possible, helpful and wise in different situations) will

³⁹ FABC III, 15, in FAPA I, 60, emphasis mine. For a more detailed presentation of these constants, see FABC III, 7.1-7.9, in FAPA I, 56. Regarding the “constants” in the life of the church in history, cf. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

⁴⁰ FABC III, 8.1, in FAPA I, 56-57, emphasis mine.

⁴¹ FABC III, 8.2, in FAPA I, 57. For an overview of the FABC’s initiatives on interreligious dialogue, cf. FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, “A Glimpse at Dialogue in Asia: 30th Anniversary First Bishops’ Institute for interreligious Dialogue (BIRA),” *FABC Papers* No. 131 (2010): 1-66, <http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/FABC%20Paper%20131.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2011) and James H. Kroeger, “Walking the Path of Dialogue: Insights from the FABC,” *Studia Missionalia* 58 (2009): 45-77.

reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvelous variety of ways. These are perhaps different from our own, but through them we too may hear His voice calling us to lift our hearts to the Father.⁴²

In FABC III's ecclesiology, one finds both explicit and implicit references to the role of the Spirit in the Church. Explicitly, it states that the Church is a communion rooted in the Father, the Son and the *Holy Spirit*, a community that is called to live and act under the guidance of the Spirit. It is only when the Church is genuinely open to and led by this life-giving Spirit that it will truly accomplish its mission of building the Kingdom of God. Any success in its missionary activity is to be measured in terms of its openness to the Spirit. Furthermore, FABC III stresses the need of the Christian communities to discern the Spirit's presences in peoples of other faiths – their lives, rituals and histories. In and through them, the Church can learn how to be more faithful disciples of Jesus since God also speaks to them and through them, and so can also speak to us. This is not something that can be known *a priori* but only when the Church journeys with them in dialogue.

Implicit in the FABC III's ecclesiology is the understanding that the Church is a communion in the Spirit, which is enabled to pray, contemplate, discern and celebrate the sacraments because of the same Spirit.⁴³ The Spirit is the acting subject of the Christian's and the Church's prayer and liturgical life. The genuineness of one's prayer and liturgical life is dependent on the Spirit. Moreover, faithful discipleship is fundamentally living by the Spirit amidst the concrete realities of life.

FABC Fifth Plenary Assembly. FABC V enumerates four major dimensions of this "new way of being Church."⁴⁴ First, the Church is a communion of communities called together by the word of God. It is a communion that is called to form small Christian communities that pray, share and live the Gospel together in their daily life. Second, it is a participatory Church that is endowed with charisms which are recognized and utilized for the building up of the Church and the realization of its mission. An important dimension of a participatory Church is that all its members are enabled to participate in the decision-making processes in the Church. Third, it is a witnessing Church that engages in dialogue those who are outside it with a view to the integral liberation of all. And fourth, it is a leaven of transformation and a prophetic sign of the Kingdom. To be prophetic means to denounce human activities, systems and structures that degrade the human person and to offer an alternative

⁴² FABC Second Plenary Assembly (FABC II), 35, in FAPA I, 35.

⁴³ Cf. FABC IX, *FABC Papers*, 15, 17.

⁴⁴ FABC V, 8.1.1-8.1.4, in FAPA I, 287-88. For a case study of this "new way of being Church" on the level of an archdiocese, see Orlando Quevedo, "Communion and Solidarity – Towards a New Way of Being Church. A Case Study," *FABC Papers* No. 83 (1998): 25-42.

vision of life based on the Kingdom. In this way, the Church will truly become an agent of change in making the world of Asia a more humane one. For FABC V, at the center of this “new way of being Church” is

the action of the Spirit of Jesus, guiding and directing individual believers as well as the whole community to live a life that is Spirit-filled – that is, to live an authentic spirituality. It is nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia.⁴⁵

In other words, it is the Spirit that enables the Church to birth new life in a world that is often characterized by the poverty and oppression of its people.

In the reflections of the ACMC, FABC III and FABC V, the “newness” of being Church lies in its emphasis on the responsibility of the local church for their own growth and development, its call for the participation of all in the Church, and its challenge for the Christian communities to be responsive to the issues that their communities face. This stands in stark contrast to an autocratic conception of the Church and to a paternalistic understanding of the relation between Rome and the various local churches. Given the long history of colonization among the local churches in Asia, the FABC stresses the need for these churches to be truly incarnated in their cultures and histories.⁴⁶ As the ICM professes,

We believe that the Spirit of the Lord calls each people and each culture to its own fresh and creative response to the gospel. Each local church has its own vocation in the one history of salvation, in the one Church of Christ. In each local church each people’s history, each people’s culture, meanings and values, each people’s traditions are taken up, not diminished nor destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified if need be, and fulfilled (as the Second Vatican Council teaches) in the life of the Spirit.⁴⁷

The FABC also stresses the participation of every baptized person in the Church’s mission.⁴⁸ Every Christian, no matter what state she or he is in, is called to contribute her or his charisms for the accomplishment of the Church’s mission. In this regard, a particular concern of the FABC is the participation of the laity in the

⁴⁵ FABC V, 9.1, in FAPA I, 288.

⁴⁶ For an overview on the theme on inculturation in the FABC, cf. James H. Kroeger, “The Faith-Culture Dialogue in Asia: Ten FABC Insights on Inculturation,” *Studia Missionalia* 57 (2008): 91-115; and James H. Kroeger, ed., “Inculturation in Asia: Directions, Initiatives, and Options,” *FABC Papers* No. 115 (2005), <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-115.htm> (accessed 22 January 2011).

⁴⁷ ICM, 130, in FAPA I, 130.

⁴⁸ See FABC V, 3.2-3.2.5, in FAPA I, 280-81.

Church's mission.⁴⁹ Moreover, a local church must grapple head on with the problems of their societies. As FABC III states, "Our theological vision must be turned ever more resolutely to the Church's responsibility in the world, in the public spheres, in the construction of a more fully human future for Asian peoples."⁵⁰

FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly. In addition to these reflections on the "new way of being Church in Asia," FABC VI made the pneumatological dimension of the Church more explicit in its reflections.⁵¹ It confessed that "[a]ll life is related to the active presence of the Creator Spirit."⁵² Jesus himself is filled with the Spirit in his life and ministry and "[a]s the Risen One, he breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples (Jn. 20:22f), making them partakers of his life and mission."⁵³ It is because of this that the same assembly states,

It is the Spirit of Jesus that creates the disciple-community. And it is by the power of the Spirit that we believe in him (1 Jn. 4:2f), remember him (Jn. 14:26), communicate with him (Acts 8:39) and live by him (2 Cor. 12:13). Discipleship is living by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and by the demands of the Kingdom of Life.

The peoples of Asia will be drawn to Jesus if his disciples abide in his life (Jn. 15:4).⁵⁴

It is the same Spirit that comforts and rejuvenates Jesus' disciples as they follow him amidst the vicissitudes of life.⁵⁵ Discipleship in the Spirit of life, for FABC VI, means to be in communion with God, to engage in a liberating and recreating

⁴⁹ See for example, FABC IV in FAPA I, 177-98; First Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate, Second Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate, Third Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate and Fourth Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate in FAPA I, 235-46, 295-98. For a study of the FABC's understanding of lay ministries in the Church, see Petrus Maria Handoko, *Lay Ministries in the Mission and Ministry of the Church in Asia: A Critical Study of the Documents of the FABC, 1970-1991* (S.T.D. Diss. Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, Faculty of Theology, 1993). Using computer lingo, Antoinette Gutzler "scans" the church for two particular "viruses" that impede the movement of renewal that was ushered in by Vatican II: clericalism and colonialism (Antoinette Gutzler, MM, "Journeying to the Other Side: Beyond Previously Accepted Boundaries," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42 (2005): 147-64, <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr005/eapr005.htm> (accessed 22 May 2008). In light of what we have seen in terms of the FABC's emphasis on a "new way of being Church in Asia," one can see that these are "viruses" that the FABC is aware of and which it has made an effort to "clean."

⁵⁰ FABC III, 17.1, in FAPA I, 60.

⁵¹ FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly (FABC VI), 12-13.5, in FAPA II, 6-7. Luis Antonio Tagle's position paper for FABC VI informed and influenced the final statement of FABC VI, see Luis Antonio Tagle, "Jesus Christ: His Service to Life. Discipleship in the Spirit of Life," *FABC Papers* No. 71 (1995): 1-28.

⁵² FABC VI, 12, in FAPA II, 6.

⁵³ FABC VI, 12, in FAPA II, 6.

⁵⁴ FABC VI, 14, in FAPA II, 7.

⁵⁵ See FABC VI, 13.5, in FAPA II, 7.

communion among neighbors, to confront and act against injustice and oppression, to be symbols of hope, and to live lives that are marked by the fruits of the Spirit.⁵⁶ For the bishops of FABC VI,

The Spirit is the powerful breath animating the mission of the disciples of Christ. Whether in explicit proclamation of the Gospel or in the silence of prayer, whether in the warmth of personal contact or the burden of the liberative action, the Spirit of life guides, sanctifies and unifies the disciple-community for the world and humanity. The deepest communication of the Church in Asia is its Spirit-filled and multiform mission of sharing Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.⁵⁷

Evidently for FABC VI, the Spirit is at the heart of the Church, and without the Spirit the Church would not exist at all or perform its mission.

Nevertheless, the FABC is aware that the local churches in Asia still have a long way to go in realizing this “new way of being Church.”⁵⁸ This is why, as “Asia’s continuing Vatican II,”⁵⁹ the FABC sees the need of the Asian Church to constantly renew itself in order that it may accomplish more effectively and fruitfully its “mission of love and service.”⁶⁰ For the Asian bishops, this renewal is intimately related with the activity of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ FABC VII states it thus, “For us in Asia, to renew the Church is to be open to the mystery of the Spirit, to welcome the arriving presence of the God of surprises who will capture our hearts in wonder.”⁶² Moreover, it is only by the power of the Spirit that the world would truly be renewed.⁶³

⁵⁶ FABC VI, 14.1-14.5, in FAPA II, 7-10.

⁵⁷ FABC VI, 14.5, in FAPA II, 10.

⁵⁸ For a reflection on this new way of being church, see for example, Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity*,” in *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 253-57.

⁵⁹ This description of the FABC comes from James H. Kroeger’s endorsement of the book, FAPA IV, in its back cover.

⁶⁰ This comes from the theme of FABC Seventh Plenary Assembly (FABC VII), “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service” (see FABC VII in FAPA III, 1-16). FABC VII sees eight movements in Asia that as a whole constitute a renewed vision of the Asian Church: i) movement toward a Church of the Poor and of the Young; ii) movement toward a “truly local Church”; iii) movement toward deep interiority; iv) movement toward an authentic community of faith; v) movement toward active integral evangelization; vi) movement toward empowerment of men and women; vii) movement toward active involvement in generating and serving life; and viii) movement toward the triple dialogue (Ibid.)

⁶¹ See FABC VII in FAPA III, 6; ICM, 13, in FAPA I, 130. It is also the same Spirit that is at the heart of the world’s renewal. As FABC II stated, “We believe that finally the power of God’s love is the only force which truly renew the world. This force is the power of the Spirit; it is given to us by the Lord through prayer” (FABC II, 45, in FAPA I, 37).

⁶² FABC VII in FAPA III, 6.

⁶³ See FABC II, 45, in FAPA I, 37.

To sum up then our discussion of the relationship between the Spirit and the Church: the Church is a community that came to be because of the Spirit. Its being and its mission are totally dependent on the Spirit. It is a Spirit-filled community that the Spirit endows with different charisms and whose ministries the Spirit inspires. Filled with the Spirit's gifts and impelled and renewed by the Spirit, the Church accomplishes its mission in discerning the signs of the times, engaging with the existential realities of life and responding with deeds of love and service, especially where the poor and the oppressed are concerned. It is because of the Spirit that both Christians and Christian communities are able to witness to the self-emptying love of Jesus for the world.

The Church, the Spirit and Dialogue

At this point, I would like to focus on the Church's task to engage in dialogue those who belong to other religious traditions. If the Church is to discern the Spirit's presence in other faiths, it is necessary that the Church dialogue with them. For the FABC, the Church as the community "where the Spirit flourishes"⁶⁴ is called to be the community that seeks the Spirit's presence in the world, particularly in the religious other. This seeking of the Spirit's presence outside the Church is an affirmation of the Church's belief that the Spirit blows wherever it wills: "God is present and working through the Spirit in the whole of creation and the Christian, together with people of other faiths, strives to discover this transforming love of God and makes it a more living experience."⁶⁵ This journey with the Spirit is a "relentless search for the realms of the unfolding of the Spirit in the existential struggles of life."⁶⁶ The Spirit that is bestowed on all peoples "continues to weave bonds of unity among them today, and guides them towards wholeness and integrity. And in this forward movement of humankind is drawn the entire 'creation (which) has been groaning in travail together until now' (Rom 8:22)."⁶⁷

In a particular way, the Spirit is present and active in other religious traditions, "moving the faithful believers of each tradition to a greater commitment to truth and more authentic communion within and beyond their own tradition."⁶⁸ Interreligious

⁶⁴ This image of the Church is used by Richard Lennan in *Risking the Church: The Challenges of Catholic Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 87-121. I think this image aptly captures the FABC's understanding of the role of the Spirit in the Church.

⁶⁵ ICM, Consensus Paper, Workshop III, 3, in FAPA I, 141. See also BIRA III, 2, in FAPA I, 119; CCPMA, 8, in FAPA I, 3; BIRA II, 12, in FAPA I, 115; FABC V, 3.1.1, in FAPA I, 279-80.

⁶⁶ First Program of Faith Encounters in Social Action (FEISA I), 7.2.4, in FAPA II, 60.

⁶⁷ BIRA IV/10, 10, in FAPA I, 320.

⁶⁸ Twelfth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, 7, in FAPA I, 326. For BIRA IV/I, "the Spirit acts in freedom and His action cannot be reduced to persons, traditions, institutions or problems of relationships. The Spirit's actions, His presence and ministry, can – and must – be discerned both

dialogue then is considered by the FABC as the work of the Spirit. In it, the Church seeks and discerns the same Spirit's presence and activity in the religious other. As the work of the Spirit, dialogue

... must lead to mutual understanding, respect and enrichment. Dialogue must be open to proclamation, though one does not enter into interreligious dialogue to prepare the way for proclamation. It is the Spirit who decides whether or not one must proclaim. It is the same Spirit who decides when, where and how one must proclaim... The task of the Christian engaged in dialogue is to discern the movements of the Spirit and to second his actions.⁶⁹

The journey of dialogue therefore, at its very core, entails perceiving and honouring the divine Spirit at work in all peoples, cultures and religions. For the divine Spirit blows wherever it wills... This journey is more properly to be understood as a pilgrimage to the Divine or Sacred, however that Divine or sacred is named. In this pilgrimage all peoples are caught up...⁷⁰

Moreover, in dialogue, the Spirit calls on the dialogue partners to become more deeply aware of God's providence and will as it is manifested both in their own and the other's tradition, as well as in the realities of life.⁷¹ BIRA IV/7 expressed this in the following way:

In a situation of prejudice brought about by fundamentalism and revivalism, dialogue means an abiding and genuine search for goodness, beauty, and truth following the beckoning of the Spirit who leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13). This search is based on the conviction that no one person has a monopoly of these. It is the same Spirit who leads us to discern the face of God and to contemplate his splendor in the other.⁷²

The Asian bishops have committed themselves to this endeavor and it is especially in this dialogue with the many faces of the poor and with other believers that the Spirit will graciously reveal more of God as God beckons all to share more fully in the divine life.

BIRA IV/3's reflection on this point synthesizes what the FABC has been saying regarding the Church's task to discern the Spirit in other traditions. BIRA IV/3 points out the need for Asian Catholics to have a deepened knowledge of in other religions and even in secular movements that may be shaped and leading to the Kingdom of God" (BIRA IV/1, 10, in FAPA I, 249).

⁶⁹ BIRA IV/7, 13, in FAPA I, 310. Cf. also FIRA I, 2.4, in FAPA III, 120; First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, 5, in FAPA I, 110.

⁷⁰ FIRA I, 2.4-2.5, in FAPA III, 120.

⁷¹ See CCPMA, 15, in FAPA I, 168.

⁷² BIRA IV/7, 14, in FAPA I, 310.

Asian religions and ideologies as well as to theologize critically on the Christian communities' interfaith encounter.⁷³ More important than these, however, is "the inculcation of the correct attitude to the workings of the Spirit beyond the boundaries of the Church."⁷⁴ Why is this so? The reason, according to BIRA IV/3, is as follows:

The presence of the Holy Spirit in and beyond the Church in Asia may be perceived in a variety of ways. This is due, in part, to the fact that people encounter the Spirit within their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, culture and worldviews. In this light, we affirm a stance of *receptive pluralism*. That is, the many ways of responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit must be continually in conversation with one another. A relationship of dynamic tension may open the way for mutual information, inspiration, support and correction.⁷⁵

For the bishops, then, there is a variety of ways by which the Spirit is experienced by different peoples. Apparently, for the bishops, one's religion, culture and worldview influences the way one perceives and responds to the Spirit. This partly accounts for the plurality of responses to the Spirit. The task of the Church in this situation is to be open and receptive to the ways the Spirit reveals itself in and through other believers and the ways they respond to it. This is particularly important since, as FABC II acknowledges, the ways the Spirit moves in others may be different from our own and may not be immediately recognizable for Christians. These are responses which are expressed in the lives of other religious believers as well as in their own religious traditions. This point is further affirmed by BIRA IV/7 when it notes: "The great religions of Asia with their respective creeds, cults and codes reveal to us *diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures*."⁷⁶ It is the Spirit that both creates unity among peoples of diverse cultures and faiths and impels all believers to be more committed to the values of the Kingdom. Significantly, for BIRA IV/3, a dynamic tension exists between the variety of ways of responding to the Spirit, a situation that "may open the way for mutual information, inspiration, support and correction."⁷⁷ It implies then that just as the Church can help others discern the Spirit's presence in their lives and traditions, the Spirit's presence in others can help the Church grow in its faithfulness to its mission. Hence, the bishops advocate a stand of receptive pluralism, a position that requires both dialogue among the different ways of responding to the Spirit and discernment in order to distinguish those ways which are really from the Spirit from those which

⁷³ Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/3), 14-15, in FAPA I, 260-61.

⁷⁴ BIRA IV/3, 16, in FAPA I, 261.

⁷⁵ BIRA IV/3, 16, in FAPA I, 261.

⁷⁶ BIRA IV/7, 12, in FAPA I, 310, emphasis mine.

⁷⁷ BIRA IV/3, 16, in FAPA I, 261.

come from other sources. This leads then to the next topic, which is the Church's task of discerning the Spirit in other religious traditions.

The Discernment of the Spirit in Interreligious Dialogue

A crucial element in the Church's engagement in interreligious dialogue is discernment. It is a necessary and indispensable aspect of a Christian's and the Church's life since there are other spirits in one's spiritual life and in the world which are not of God and there are people who falsely claim that they have the Spirit. Thus in order to sift the wheat from the chaff, a Christian needs to listen to the movements of the Spirit in one's life, community and the world at large. Discernment itself is the work of the Spirit within the Christian and the Church. It is also a discernment of the Spirit's activity in others with the assistance of the same Spirit that has been poured into the Church at Pentecost. For FABC IV, "Our spirituality is one of discerning the movement of the Spirit who re-enacts in us the mysteries of Jesus Christ in the contextual realities of daily living and struggling."⁷⁸

In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary that the Asian Christian communities be truly communities of prayer.⁷⁹ It is only with a prayerful disposition that the Christian and the Church will grow in sensitivity to the Spirit and, thus, distinguish between the different spirits that are at work in life. As FABC II states, "It [Christian prayer] is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), enabling us to turn to God and with confidence to call him Father (cf. Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6)."⁸⁰ Moreover, "we must learn to empty ourselves of all prejudices and unrealistic expectations, to be still and listen to what the Spirit and our partner in dialogue are saying – not only through words but through silence and lived faith as well."⁸¹ Without prayer, there is a real danger that the Church would be engaged in missionary work *for* God without it being truly *of* God.⁸² As FABC II again states, "Christian prayer is

⁷⁸ FABC IV, 4.8.3, in FAPA I, 196.

⁷⁹ The FABC tackled in its Second Plenary Assembly the theme, "Prayer – The Life of the Church in Asia" (see FAPA I, 27-48). In the face of what it considers the "crisis" in Asia, the said assembly pointed to the need for the Asian Church "to become more fully a community of prayer, - a deeply praying community whose contemplation is inserted in the context of our time and the cultures of our peoples today" (FABC II, 12, in FAPA I, 31). At the heart of being a prayerful community for the Asian bishops is the Eucharist (cf. FABC XI, *FABC Papers*, 3-19).

⁸⁰ FABC II, 14, in FAPA I, 31-32.

⁸¹ BIRA IV/3, 8, in FAPA I, 259.

⁸² The following statement of the ACMC speaks of the necessity of prayer in the Church's missionary activities: "Identifying and analyzing the signs of the times is our task, if we want to discover the path the Lord of history wants His Church in Asia to tread. But the correct interpretation of facts can only be given to us by the Spirit of the Lord and it will be heard only by those who are attuned to His voice. For too long we have been accustomed to plan building up the Kingdom of God in Asia in our own way – and therefore with little success" (ACMC, 20, in FAPA I, 71).

necessary if we are to bring the spirit and power of the gospel and the Christ-life into the effort to achieve genuine human liberation and development.”⁸³ In the process of becoming a truly prayerful community, the FABC admits that, first, the Church can learn from the spiritual traditions of other religions and that, second, it needs to express its own spirituality in a truly Asian way.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the Christian faith is often perceived in Asia as not having a contemplative dimension, unlike other Asian religions which have proven to be the wellspring of the spiritual life of the vast majority of Asians,⁸⁵ and “as struggling to free herself from her historical burden, e.g., from the stigmata of being foreign to the eyes of both her own children and the peoples of Asia, and from the scars of being attached to alienating structures.”⁸⁶ Hence, this accounts for the openness of the FABC to learn from other traditions and for its desire to express its spirituality using the cultural resources of its peoples.

What are the criteria then for the discernment of the Spirit? The OTC lists five criteria for discernment.⁸⁷ Although the OTC enumerates them as general criteria, they too can serve in the Church’s discernment of the Spirit as it may be present in other religious traditions.

The first and most fundamental criterion is the presence of fruits of the Spirit. As BIRA IV/3 states,

We affirm that the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, should be our constant guides in discerning the presence of the Spirit... Any exercise of the gifts of the Spirit may be seen as legitimate if it bears the fruits of the Spirit.⁸⁸

⁸³ FABC II, 22, in FAPA I, 33.

⁸⁴ See FABC II, 30-33, in FAPA I, 34-35. JEF II makes as its own Aloysius Pieris’ assertion that the Church needs undergo Jesus’ double baptism in Jordan and in Calvary: “... our Christian mission for a culture of peace has to be a mission together with the peoples of other religions, as well as for and on behalf of the peoples of other religions. Baptized, therefore, in the Jordan of Asia’s religiousness and in the Calvary of Asia’s poor, we Christians learn from our neighbours of other faiths the cardinal virtues of simplicity, non-attachment and commitment to alleviate the sufferings of the poor” (JEF II, 15, in FAPA IV, 193).

⁸⁵ FABC II, 28, in FAPA I, 34.

⁸⁶ Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue, 3, in FAPA I, 251.

⁸⁷ OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” 3.10.2-3.10.2.5, in FAPA III, 298-99. Amos Yong offers five theses in his pneumatological theology of discernment: (i) Christian discernment should be guided by the biblical and ecclesial traditions; (ii) Christian discernment should be normed by Jesus Christ; (iii) Christian discernment should be discerning also about its contexts of activity; (iv) Christian discernment should emerge from a dialogical, dialectical, and dynamic criteriology; and (v) Christian discernment on this side of the eschaton should be judged ethically and morally (Amos Yong, “The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) ‘After’ Buddhism,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004): 191-207).

⁸⁸ BIRA IV/3, in FAPA I, 260.

This in relation to other faiths, means that a belief, ritual or way of living in other religious traditions that inspires, bears and fosters the fruits of the Spirit is of God, a grace-filled concretization of the Spirit's movement in the person's life as well as in her or his tradition.

The second criterion concerns the values of the Kingdom of God. Wherever the values of the Kingdom are manifested, there the Spirit is present: "the working of the Spirit of God in the history of humankind is to be understood and interpreted in relation to the kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ."⁸⁹ This is the reason why the ICM has affirmed the Spirit's presence and action in "the desire of many... for greater simplicity of life and even the experience of poverty as a following of Jesus, as solidarity with the suffering and powerless poor," as well as in "the increased commitment to tasks of human development and struggles for justice and human rights."⁹⁰ Thus, the values of the Kingdom provide a second criterion for discerning the Spirit's presence.

The third test of the Spirit's presence is the ecclesiological criterion, the sense of the faith of the Church. The OTC argues that the "Incarnated Word or Truth present in the Church through its confession and proclamation is intimately related with the working of the Spirit. There is no Spirit without the Word; and there is no Word without the Spirit."⁹¹ In other words, it is because of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, that the Church is enabled to understand, interpret and proclaim God's salvific act to the world in Jesus Christ. The faithfulness of the Church to this treasury, the deposit of faith, is guaranteed not primarily because of the Church's own efforts not to fail but because of the Spirit's activity within the Church that protects it from errors with regard to matters that are integral to the following of Jesus. This is why BIRA IV/3 asserts that:

Any discernment of the Spirit... stands in relation to the Church's memory and interpretation of the reality of Jesus Christ. The Church's accumulated wisdom and insights into the Christ event have exerted a formative and normative influence upon the life and mission/ministry of the Christian community. They also have, in some instances, earned the respect and a measure of assent from those beyond the fold of the Church. In fact, they are definitive testing points for testing the authenticity of contemporary encounters with the Spirit.⁹²

⁸⁹ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.10.2.2, in FAPA III, 298.

⁹⁰ ICM, 12, in FAPA I, 129-30; cf. also FABC III, 11.4-11.5, in FAPA I, 59.

⁹¹ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.10.2.3, in FAPA III, 298.

⁹² BIRA IV/3, 13, in FAPA I, 260. John Paul II explains this ecclesial dimension in the following way: "Moreover, the universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the body of Christ, which is the Church. Indeed, it is always the Spirit who is at work, both when he gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and

This means then that anything that contradicts the Church's sense of faith is not of the Spirit; nevertheless, this does not mean that an action, a belief or a ritual has to be explicitly part and parcel of the church's understanding of its faith. It may be that there are elements in the faith of others which do not necessarily go against the Church's faith but which may even enrich the Church's understanding and living of the Gospel message.

The fourth criterion is a listening attitude. In order that the Church may truly be a community that is guided by the Spirit, one needs the basic attitude of listening, and openness, to the Spirit. "On the one hand because of the presence of the Truth and of the Spirit in the Church, the Church needs to be listened to. On the other hand, since the presence of the Truth and the Spirit is not limited to the Church, the Church needs to be open to the presence of the Truth and the Spirit in all human realities."⁹³ Without this listening attitude, the Church would not hear God's "still small voice" (cf. 1 Kgs 19:12) in the signs of the times, particularly in other religious traditions.⁹⁴

The fifth and last criterion mentioned by the OTC is the unity or harmony of love. Paul emphasizes the importance of unity that should exist with the diversity of gifts given to the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12-14), among which love is the greatest (1 Cor 13). "Thus a harmonious use of the gifts of the Spirit resulting in unity and love could be taken as another of the criteria for discerning the Spirit at work in the Church."⁹⁵ Analogously then, since the Spirit bestows gifts on peoples of other religions, discernment first entails discerning what these gifts are and, then, seeing how these lead to greater love and unity not only within their own tradition but beyond as well.

In addition to the five criteria given by the OTC, BIRA IV/3 adds an important Trinitarian criterion. For this institute, any discernment of the Spirit's presence is inseparable from and is in relation to Jesus Christ:

We affirm [that] any effort towards an experience of immediate access to the Spirit has to be seen in relation to Jesus Christ to whom the Spirit bears witness. What is done in the name of the Holy Spirit must be in keeping

develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples, guiding the Church to discover these gifts, to foster them and to receive them through dialogue. Every form of the Spirit's presence is to be welcomed with respect and gratitude, but the discernment of this presence is the responsibility of the Church, to which Christ gave his Spirit in order to guide her into all the truth (see Jn 16:13)" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 29).

⁹³ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.10.2.4, in FAPA III, 299.

⁹⁴ It may be observed that the fourth criterion refers more to a disposition needed for discernment. While it is true that discernment demands openness, it seems that the OTC here wants to highlight a basic openness to others as characteristic of a person or community in whom or where the Spirit resides.

⁹⁵ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.10.2.5, in FAPA III, 299. Cf. FABC VIII, 60-61, in FAPA IV, 23.

with the life, teachings and mission of Jesus Christ. Christ promised his disciples to send the Holy Spirit as their Counsellor, Intercessor and Advocate. What the Spirit does, and continues to do, is inseparable from what Christ said and did.⁹⁶

Any affirmation, then, of the Spirit's presence in other traditions is also an affirmation of the Spirit of Christ. The OTC adds with respect to the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Spirit:

The more we follow the leading of the Spirit, the deeper and closer will also be our understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ. It also helps us to relate in a harmonious and integral way the universal plan of God manifested in Jesus Christ with our Asian history and experiences.⁹⁷

It is no wonder then that FABC IV pointed out that Christian spirituality is both christocentric and pneumatocentric:

It is a *living in the Spirit* of Jesus (cf. Rom 8:1-17), urging us to be his disciples through a dynamic process of being incarnated into the realities of the times, as Jesus was, and of discerning in the Spirit those realities that lead to death and those that lead to life. Jesus was Spirit-led (cf. e.g., Lk 4:1), and full of the Spirit (e.g., Lk 4:14); so too should the Christian. Our spirituality is one of discerning the movement of the Spirit who re-enacts in us the mysteries of Jesus Christ in the contextual realities of daily living and struggling.⁹⁸

It is important to stress that each of these criteria has to be used in conjunction with each other and not as separate or disparate elements in discernment. In order

⁹⁶ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 11, in FAPA III, 260. The same point is made by John Paul II again in *Redemptoris Missio* although he interprets the Spirit's presence as a preparation for the Gospel, a point not found in BIRA IV/3: "He (the Spirit) 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, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit 'so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things'" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 29).

⁹⁷ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," in FAPA III, 238. Jacques Dupuis argues in the same way regarding the inseparability and complementarity of pneumatocentrism and Christocentrism: "If, then, the Spirit is present in active in history before the event Jesus Christ, he is so in view of, and in relation to, the historical event which stands at the center of the history of salvation. The specific function of the Spirit consists in allowing persons to become sharers, whether before or after the event, of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (see GS 22). Thus, through the power of the Spirit, the Jesus Christ event is being actuated through all times; it is present and active in every generation. In all cases the immediate influence of the Spirit gives expression to the operative presence to God's saving action which has come to a climax in Jesus Christ" (Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 197).

⁹⁸ FABC IV, 4.8.3, in FAPA I, 195-96; emphasis in the original.

that the Church may “test the spirits to see whether they are of God” (1 Jn 4:1), then the Church may be served and guided well by these criteria. It is only in the process of discernment that the Church may be able to truly affirm the Spirit’s actions in other religious tradition, a presence that speaks not only to the members of those traditions but also to the Church as it seeks to “find God in all things” and cooperate with God in building the Kingdom.⁹⁹

“The Hands of the Father” – The Word and the Spirit

Irenaeus of Lyons refers to the Word and the Spirit as “the hands of the Father.”¹⁰⁰ Yong asserts that this metaphor

enable[s] us to envision the truth that God works all things with the divine hands: by and through *both* Word and Spirit. This means *not* that some things are to be considered manifestations of the Word and other things of Spirit, but that Word and Spirit are inseparable features of *all* things.¹⁰¹

The inseparability of the Word and the Spirit is grounded in the intratrinitarian life of *circumincessio* and *perichoresis* and that is implicitly acknowledged in the FABC’s statements.¹⁰² While this metaphor of the “hands of God” refers to God’s economy in the world, what I intend to do in this section is to discuss the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit as seen in the FABC documents. To this end, I will consider two documents, FABC VI and the OTC’s *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*.

FABC VI, held in 1995 in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the FABC, had as its theme, “Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life.” Integral to its reflection on the meaning of discipleship in Asia as service to life is its analysis of the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit:

All life is related to the active presence of the Creator Spirit. No wonder Jesus, confessed as Messiah and Lord, is Spirit-filled. He who is The Life is dependent on the Spirit. Conceived in the virgin’s womb by the Spirit’s power (Lk 1:35, Mt 1:20), anointed by the Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan (Mk 1:10), driven to the wilderness by the Spirit to be prepared

⁹⁹ “Finding God in all things” is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality and it encapsulates the thrust of the process of discernment.

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, Preface, 4.

¹⁰¹ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 43, emphasis in the original.

¹⁰² See for examples, FABC I, 5, 6, and 30, in FAPA I, 13, and 16; FABC II, 5, 6, and 14, in FAPA I, 30, 31-32; FABC III, 6, 7.2, 7.9, in FAPA I, 55, 56; ACMC, 21-23, in FAPA I, 71-72; BIRA II, 12, in FAPA I, 115; BIRA III, 2, in FAPA I, 119; ICM, 2, 15-16, in FAPA I, 128, 130; CCPMA, 7, in FAPA I, 166; FABC IV, 1.5, 4.8.3, 4.8.7, 4.8.8, in FAPA I, 178, 195-97; FABC V, 3.1.1-3.1.2, 6.3, in FAPA I, 279-80, 283.

for his mission (Mt 4:1), sent to preach the good news of salvation by the Spirit's action (Lk 4:18-19), Jesus ushers in the new creation, the fullness of life in God. As the Risen One, he breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples (Jn 20:22f), making them partakers of his life and mission.¹⁰³

This is a thoroughly biblical reflection on the role of the Spirit in Jesus' life, stressing the Spirit's presence in important events in Jesus' life – his conception, baptism, preparation for and inauguration of his mission, and resurrected life. In sum, what this text is saying is that Jesus is truly Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.¹⁰⁴

However, FABC VI is silent with regard to the mission of the Spirit after Jesus' ascension, particularly in relation to the Spirit's role in enabling his followers to better understand Jesus and his message. Moreover, it deals only with the relationship between the incarnate Word and the Spirit and not with the Word before the incarnation. On this point, BIRA IV/3 says the following:

... Asian realities and the impulse of Vatican II urge us to develop a deeper understanding of the Spirit of God. It is the same Spirit, who has been active in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the Church, who was active amongst all peoples before the Incarnation and is active amongst the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today.¹⁰⁵

As we can see, for BIRA IV/3 the Spirit was present before the Incarnation and in Jesus' life and ministry, has been present in the Church, and is also present in the world. Significantly, in terms of the previous chapter's discussion of the FABC's regnocentric model, for FABC VI, the vision of life that emerges from this Spirit-filled Jesus is the Kingdom of God for which he totally gave himself.¹⁰⁶

Understandably, the theological body of the FABC, the OTC, gives a more systematic treatment of the relationship between the Word, Jesus and the Spirit in its document, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today."¹⁰⁷ The OTC states that the Spirit of God is intimately related with the Word of God, a relationship that is already seen in God's work of creation. Moreover, the Word's and Spirit's relationship is not

¹⁰³ FABC VI, 12, in FAPA II, 6. Similarly, FABC IV asserts, "Jesus was Spirit-led (cf. e.g. Lk 4:1), and full of the Spirit (e.g. Lk 4:14); so too should be the Christian" (FABC IV, 4.8.3, in FAPA I, 196).

¹⁰⁴ See also FABC V, 3.1.1, in FAPA I, 279; ACMC, 22, in FAPA I, 72. For a reflection on the role of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, see Soares-Prabhhu, "Jesus and the Spirit in the Synoptic Gospels," in *The Dharma of Jesus*, 13-26.

¹⁰⁵ BIRA IV/3, 6, in FAPA I, 259. Interestingly, John Paul II writes five years later in *Redemptoris Missio* almost the same thing: "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" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 29). However, there is no acknowledgement in this text of the Spirit's presence in other cultures and the world.

¹⁰⁶ See FABC VI, 13-13.5, in FAPA II, 6-7.

¹⁰⁷ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.5-3.6.3, in FAPA III, 287-89.

confined to creation but it also includes revelation, sanctification and salvation. The OTC states:

If the New Covenant is established by putting the Law (Word) of God within people (Jer 31:31-33), it is also by putting the Spirit of God within them (Ezek 36:27). The Word became flesh through the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:14; Lk 1:35). Jesus the incarnated Word is presented as one who permanently possesses the Spirit and dispenses the Spirit to believers (Jn 1:32; 3:22-26). Jesus' words are Spirit and life (Jn 6:63). The Word of God is qualified as the Sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). The new birth through the Spirit (Jn 3:5) is birth through the imperishable seed, the living and enduring Word of God (1 Pet 1:23).¹⁰⁸

Then, after this biblical exposition on the relationship between the Spirit and the Word, the OTC expounds on Sacred Scripture as the codification of the Word of God as it was experienced by Israel in its history and by the apostolic church in Jesus, the Incarnate Word. In the formation of the Bible, "the Spirit of God was guiding all those who were involved in this process."¹⁰⁹

Like BIRA IV/3, the OTC stresses the Spirit's presence in Jesus' life and ministry, from the incarnation to the resurrection.

Jesus is conceived and born of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:20; Lk 1:35). Jesus starts his public ministry having been anointed by the Holy Spirit. He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Mt 4:1). The presence of the Spirit in Jesus was manifested in his preaching the Gospel (Lk 4:18ff.), in his teaching with authority (Mk 1:22, 27), in his miracles (Mt 12:28), in his power to forgive sins (Mk 2:5-12), in his prophetic knowledge and utterances (Mt 8:31-33), and finally in his death and resurrection (Acts 2:33; 1 Cor 15:45).¹¹⁰

Jesus was not only filled with the Holy Spirit but he too is the source of the Spirit (Jn 7:37-39; Jn 19:34-35; Jn 19:30; Jn 20:22).¹¹¹ Understandably, the Spirit is presented too as the Spirit of Jesus Christ particularly in the gospel of John (Jn 14:6.16.18-23.26; 20:22).¹¹² The Spirit as the Spirit of Christ makes operative and

¹⁰⁸ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.5, in FAPA III, 287-88.

¹⁰⁹ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.5, in FAPA III, 288. Interestingly, the OTC also contends: "The same God entered the history of the various peoples through his Spirit and his Word in mysterious ways known only to Him, and therefore the Sacred scriptures of the other religions are also reflections of the presence and activity of the Spirit in the non-Christian religious traditions" (Ibid.). However, the OTC does not expound on the way in which the scriptures of other faiths are reflections of the Spirit's presence and activity.

¹¹⁰ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.6, in FAPA III, 288.

¹¹¹ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.6.1, in FAPA III, 288.

¹¹² OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.6.2, in FAPA III, 289.

brings to fulfilment the work of Christ. The work of the Spirit as teacher (Jn 14:26), witness (Jn 15:26) and judge (Jn 16:7-11) is not only related to the work of Christ but also dependent on it. Moreover, the Spirit's work in service of "Truth" (Jn 16:13; 17:17) helps us "to understand, appreciate and appropriate it [Truth] in our life."¹¹³ In other words, the Spirit enables Jesus' followers to become better disciples – to become more Christ-like.

What we have seen in this section is the intimate relationship between the Jesus and the Spirit in salvation history, a relationship that is aptly captured by the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* when it speaks of the joint mission of the Son and the Spirit:

So closely do Christ and the Spirit work together that we can rightfully speak of the "joint mission of the Son and of the Spirit" (cf. CCC 689, 702, 727). When the Father sends His Word, He always sends His Breath: there occurs a joint mission in which the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable. It is Christ who appears as the visible Image of the invisible God, but it is the Holy Spirit who reveals him. The knowledge of the "mysteries of the Reign of God" of which Christ is the fullness, is "given" (Mt 13:11) in the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. CCC 729). Christ gives the form and content of salvation, while the Spirit makes present and extends this new life.¹¹⁴

Thus, for the Asian bishops, a fundamental parameter of any talk of the Spirit in other religious traditions is the "distinct but inseparable" relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. Jesus is the necessary reference point in understanding and interpreting the movements of the Spirit in others.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown how, for the FABC, it appears that the Holy Spirit can serve as a key in understanding and interpreting other religious traditions and how these are lived by their followers. The Asian bishops consistently affirm that

¹¹³ OTC, "The Spirit at Work," 3.6.3, in FAPA III, 289.

¹¹⁴ Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: ECCCE & Makati: Word & Life Publications, 1997), 1299.

¹¹⁵ Michael Amaladoss explains this relationship in the following manner: "*In the Christian community the Spirit is explicitly active in and through the community's commitment to Christ. Outside the Christian community, the Spirit is active, but its action is not mediated through an explicit commitment to Christ, though it is ordained or related to Christ. There are not two separate economies of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. There is no economy of the Spirit more universal than or separate from that of the salvific of Christ. But Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have different roles and activities, but related to each other, within the same economy*" (Michael Amaladoss, "Other Religions and the Salvific Mystery of Christ," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 70 (2006): 22, emphasis in the original).

the Holy Spirit is actively present in other religions and that these religions contain expressions and practices that are inspired and prompted by the Spirit. This is why these manifestations of the Spirit's presence demands critical discernment and that these must be in dialogue with the Spirit's activity in the Church. In and through this the Spirit's manifold works within and outside the Church, the Church is not only enriched but is enabled to understand more fully the reality of religious pluralism as God's gift to the Church and the world.

Abbreviations Used

ACMC	Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church
BIRA I	First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BIRA II	Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BIRA III	Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BIRA IV/1	First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/3	Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/7	Seventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/10	Tenth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/11	Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BISA VII	Seventh Bishops' Institute for Social Action
CCPMA	Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
FABC I	FABC First Plenary Assembly
FABC II	FABC Second Plenary Assembly
FABC III	FABC Third Plenary Assembly
FABC IV	FABC Fourth Plenary Assembly
FABC V	FABC Fifth Plenary Assembly
FABC VI	FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly
FABC VII	FABC Seventh Plenary Assembly
FABC VIII	FABC Eighth Plenary Assembly
FABC IX	FABC Ninth Plenary Assembly
FAPA I	<i>For All the Peoples of Asia</i> , vol. 1
FAPA II	<i>For All the Peoples of Asia</i> , vol. 2
FAPA III	<i>For All the Peoples of Asia</i> , vol. 3
FAPA IV	<i>For All the Peoples of Asia</i> , vol. 4
FEISA I	First Program of Faith Encounters in Social Action

FIRA I	First Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs
FIRA V	Fifth Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs
ICM	International Congress on Mission
JEF II	Second CCA-FABC Joint Ecumenical Formation
OTC	Office of Theological Concerns

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