

**A GLIMPSE AT DIALOGUE IN ASIA**

**30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

**FIRST BISHOPS' INSTITUTE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS  
(BIRA)**

**By  
FABC Office of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs  
(OEIA)**

*Chairman*

**Archbishop Fernando Capalla**

Davao, Philippines

*Members*

**Bishop John Hsane Hgyi**

Patheingyi, Myanmar

**Archbishop Hyginus Kim**

Kwangju, South Korea

**Bishop Bejoy Nicephorus D'Cruze**

Khulna, Bangladesh

*Executive Secretary*

Sr. Clemens Mendonca

*Ecumenical Secretary*

Fr. William LaRousse, MM

---

In 1970, 180 Catholic bishops of Asia met in Manila, Philippines, at what was called the Asian Bishops' Meeting, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI. That meeting initiated what would become the Federation of Asian Bishops'

Conferences (FABC).<sup>1</sup> That Asian Bishops' Meeting passed a resolution that they both urged and supported a permanent structure for the Bishops' Conferences of Asia. The presidents of eleven Bishops' Conferences met in Hong Kong in March 1971 to discuss the nature, objectives, scope of the future Federation, and to come up with proposed structures and draft statutes. A draft of the statutes was sent to national conferences in November 1971; a second draft was approved by the presidents of 12 Asian Bishops' Conferences in August 1972 in Hong Kong. Pope Paul VI approved the statutes of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences on November 16, 1972. The first Plenary Assembly was in 1974 in Taipei, Taiwan.

The FABC is a non-juridical voluntary association of the Episcopal conferences in Asia. Its purpose is to foster among its members collaboration and communion to promote an all encompassing vision of their mission and being Church in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Compilations of all documents of the FABC from 1970 to 2006 can be found in Gaudencio Rosales and Catalino Arévalo, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992) and Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1992 to 1996*, vol. 2 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997). Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1997 to 2001*, vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002). Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 2002 to 2006*, vol. 4 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2007). These four books will be referred to as FAPA I, FAPA II, FAPA III and FAPA IV.

2. Miguel Marcelo Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents (1970-1995)* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2000), 7-10. The FABC functions through a hierarchy of structures consisting of the Plenary Assembly, the Central Committee, the Standing Committee and the Central Secretariat, and its Offices and Commissions. Effectively this means that the Plenary Assembly, which meets in ordinary session every four years, is the supreme body of FABC. The members of the Plenary Assembly are the presidents of the member

The Bishops' conferences who are members of the Federation are: Bangladesh, India (CBCI, Latin-rite, Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara), Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan (R.O.C.), Thailand, and Vietnam. While Hong Kong, Macau, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Siberia (Russia), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and East Timor have associate membership.

Asia is home to about 60% of the world's total population and about 85% of the world's non-Christians live in Asia. In Asia only 4.5% of the total population are Christians and less than 3% of Asia's population is Catholic. The minority situation of the Church in Asia is a situation that calls for dialogue, both interreligious and ecumenical. The Church in the Philippines and East Timor are in a unique position in the FABC. In East Timor about 97% of the population is Catholic and in the Philippines about 82% of the population is Catholic. In fact, about 63% of all of the Catholics in Asia are in the Philippines and East Timor. So of all of the Catholics in Asia, less than 3% of Asia's population, only slightly more than 1% of them live outside of the Philippines and East Timor.

---

conferences (who comprise the Central Committee), bishop-delegates (elected by member conferences, the number of which is proportional to the number of bishops in the conference), bishops representing countries holding associate membership, and the members of the Standing Committee (five bishops elected from different parts of Asia). In between the Plenary Assemblies, the Central Committee (which meets at least once every two years) directs the FABC. In between the Central Committee meetings, the Standing Committee (which meets at least once every year) implements the directives of the Central Committee. The Standing Committee, in turn, is assisted by the Central Secretariat, which is the principal service agency of the FABC. Under the charge of the Secretary General, who is also a bishop-member of the Central Committee, the Central Secretariat's day-to-day running is the task of the Associate Secretary General. The various Offices which have been established are specialised agencies of FABC functioning through the Central Secretariat.

The impetus to dialogue as an integral element of the Church's mission that was articulated in Vatican II and the first encyclical of Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, was well received by the Church in Asia and it has born much fruit for the Church's growing understanding of dialogue. It was in Asia that the way for dialogue was being opened before Vatican II and the collective awareness of the importance of dialogue and the direction and commitment to dialogue on the part of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has contributed to the Church as a whole and its understanding of dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

One of the functions of the FABC is to foster ecumenical and interreligious communication and collaboration. This function is the specific interest of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the FABC.<sup>4</sup>

The Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) was created at a meeting of the FABC Central Committee held in Rome in October of 1974. The Office of Human Development (OHD) was the first office established in 1973 since the theme of the 1970 meeting was human development as presented in the

---

3. Marcello Zago, "Day of Prayer for Peace," *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis* 22/1 64 (1987): 149. For example, in 1974 the FABC recommended that dialogue, which up to that point had focused on seminars by scholars, be broadened to include the dialogue of life. At that point the concept of the dialogue of life had been little discussed. This concept was incorporated into the document *Dialogue and Mission*. "It was the Christian life, lived by believers in their community of faith, that was seen as being in dialogue ... in such a way that all would be enriched by the experience." Thomas Michel, "Growing towards 'dialogue in community': A Reflection on Archbishop Jadot's Tenure at the Secretariat for Non-Christians," *Pro Dialogo Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones* 103 (2000): 69-70.

4. These are the present offices of the FABC: Office of Human Development, Office of Social Communication, Office of Laity and Family, Office of Theological Concerns, Office of Education and Faith Formation, Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Office of Evangelization, Office of Clergy, and Office of Consecrated Life

encyclical of Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*. In 1974 three offices were added to the beginnings of the FABC. These were the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the Office of Social Communication and the Office of Mission. Archbishop Stanislaus Lokuang of Taipei, Taiwan, was the first Executive Chairman. The preexisting Archdiocese of Taipei interreligious office became at the same time the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. The first meeting of the OEIA executive committee was held in Hong Kong in February 1975. In August 1978 the second meeting of the Executive Committee of the OEIA was held after having gathered information from the Bishops' Conferences through a number of questionnaires sent out since 1975. At this second meeting in 1978 the plan for the first three Bishops' Institute for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BIRA) began as a concrete way of carrying out the mandate of the office.

This presentation offers a glimpse at dialogue through the assemblies and seminars under the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) thirty years (1979-2009) after the first OEIA sponsored Bishops' Institute of Interreligious Affairs (BIRA) in 1979. Any glimpse of dialogue in a presentation like this will be limited as it offers a very summary view of the statements of the many assemblies and seminars held over the years by the OEIA. Any synopsis is required, from the many thoughts and insights presented, to choose one or two items for mention while from a different perspective other issues would seem more important. Another limitation is that all offices and plenary sessions of the FABC also deal with the issue of dialogue, but the focus here is dialogue in the work of the OEIA. Again another limitation is that there are also many important initiatives

undertaken by the Bishops' Conferences and the individual dioceses at the local level throughout Asia that are not mentioned here.<sup>5</sup>

A glimpse is just a glancing look at something; it is not a long look where our eyes are fixed for a long time on what is being observed. That long look can be found in the statements from all of the assemblies and seminars. Here we have only a glimpse. In spite of these limitations, it is hoped that this presentation can offer an overview of dialogue and the efforts of the OEIA over the past thirty years and point us towards the future as we mark in 2009, the 30th anniversary of the first BIRA.

## • **1. Dialogue in the early Teaching of FABC**

### • **1.1. *Asian Bishops Meeting – 1970***

Right from the very beginning, at the Asian Bishops Meeting of 1970, the bishops affirmed that “dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment is to other faiths is increasingly important.”<sup>6</sup> One of the resolutions of 1970 says: “We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development.”<sup>7</sup> Also the bishops turned to the other Christian communities in Asia to seek to collaborate in common endeavors

---

5. See Virginia Fabella, “The Roman Catholic Church in the Asian Ecumenical Movement,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, Volume II*, ed. Ninan Koshiy (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2004)

6. “Asian Bishops’ Meeting: Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops Meeting,” 29 November 1970, Manila, Philippines, n. 24, in FAPA I, 3-10

7 “Asian Bishops’ Meeting: Resolutions of the Asian Bishops Meeting,” n. 12

for development, freedom, justice and peace with the hope for God's will for Christian unity. Dialogue will remain in the forefront of the concerns of the FABC. "If we were to summarize the orientation of the FABC in one word, then it is dialogue. It is around this focal point that the FABC's understanding of the Church and its mission revolves."<sup>8</sup>

• **1.2. First FABC Plenary Assembly – 1974**

The theme of the First Assembly of the FABC in 1974 was evangelization in modern day Asia in preparation for the Synod of Bishops of the same year.<sup>9</sup> This was an effort to ground the work of mission in the indigenous context of each of the peoples of Asia and this concretely means continuous and humble dialogue with cultures, religions, and the poor.<sup>10</sup>

The most basic mode of mission in Asia must be dialogue, Missionary dialogue of course. We must explore the interface of the Gospel's meanings and values with the realities of Asia and its many peoples – its histories and cultures, religions and religious traditions and especially its "poor masses" in every country. These realities – cultures, religions, life situations of poverty – make up the ambience and context where the Gospel is to be proclaimed.... This overarching program of dialogue with the cultures (i.e., inculturation), with the religions and

---

8. Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," in FAPA I, xxiii.

9. "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia, Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly," 27 April 1974, Taipei, Taiwan, in FAPA I, 11-25.

10. "The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own." "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia, Statement of the First Plenary Assembly," n. 12.

religious traditions (i.e., interreligious dialogue), and with our peoples, especially the poor multitudes in Asia (i.e., development/liberation) has been the thematic background of both the pastoral and missionary activity of the local churches in Asia.<sup>11</sup>

The statement from the first assembly in 1974 evidences a positive view of other religions and how these religions have been a source of spiritual strength for their followers and that God has drawn people to himself through them. In dialogue the Church can receive much and learn new ways of expressing its own faith and through dialogue can rediscover the riches of its own faith. The Church also discerns and has a gift to offer in the process of dialogue. “It suffices, I think, to note that the first FABC Plenary Assembly Statement (28 April 1974, Taipei) serves, even today, as an overall framework for the missionary and pastoral objectives and imperatives which have been affirmed and developed in the succeeding years.”<sup>12</sup>

The assembly also addressed other Christian communities in Asia to express the resolve that mutual understanding, collaboration and oneness will grow as we together witness to the Lord in Asia.

- **1.3. *First Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate – 1978***

In 1978 the FABC held the First Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA).<sup>13</sup> Dialogue was a prominent theme. Dialogue can be used in a very superficial sense, but dialogue should be understood as “a witnessing to Christ in word

---

11. Catalino Arévalo, “... The Time of the Heirs,” in FAPA I, xix-xx.

12. Arévalo, “... The Time of the Heirs,” xvii

13. “BIMA I: Letter of the First Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate,” 27 July 1978, Baguio City, Philippines, in FAPA I, 93-96



and deed, by reaching out to people in the concrete reality of their daily lives, in their particular cultural context, their own religious traditions, their socio-economic conditions.”<sup>14</sup> It was emphasized that interreligious dialogue is neither a replacement for the proclamation of Christ nor a preliminary to proclamation. The ideal form of evangelization should be dialogue. “[I]n humility and mutual support we seek together with our brothers and sisters that fullness of Christ which is God’s plan for the whole of creation, in its entirety and its great and wonderful diversity.”<sup>15</sup>

The conclusions expressed that much more had to be done to promote interreligious dialogue. It was recommended that further study and experimentation be undertaken and that these must be rooted in local endeavors that could more adequately address each particular situation. The conclusions of this meeting were an impetus to the formation of the Bishops’ Institute of Interreligious Affairs under the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the FABC.<sup>16</sup>

#### • **1.4. Other FABC Activities**

Four other statements from the FABC prior to the initiation of the BIRA are worth mentioning.

The Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church in 1977 included in the forms of ministry for lay people the ministry of interreligious dialogue.<sup>17</sup> This Colloquium recommended that the ministry of interreligious dialogue be a recognized ministry

---

14. “BIMA I: Letter of the First Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate,” n. 5

15. “BIMA I: Letter of the First Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate,” n. 10.

16. Albert Poulet-Mathis, “Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia,” in *Mission and Dialogue: Theory and Practice*, ed. Leonardo Mercado and James Knight (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989), 66.

17. “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church: Conclusions,” 5 March 1977, Hong Kong, in FAPA I, 67-92.

in the Church for those with a knowledge and contact with other faith traditions. This ministry would foster mutual appreciation and understanding between faith communities and promote collaboration based on one's faith commitment to work for common societal projects.

The Second Plenary Assembly of the FABC in 1978 focused on the prayer in the life of the Church in Asia.<sup>18</sup> The statement of the assembly affirmed all that had been said about dialogue previous to it and it included interreligious dialogue as one of the means for the renewal of the prayer life of the Church of Asia. Christian spirituality while remaining Christian can be enriched by the spirituality of other Asian religions.

Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer ... will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvelous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them we too may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father.... It must be undertaken in all seriousness, accompanied constantly by discernment in the Spirit, fostered and safeguarded by those attitudes, which lead to its patient, loving growth. These are: openness and sensitivity, honesty and humility of spirit, a sincere disinterestedness and that fraternal love which holds in reverence the feelings of the other and seeks to enter into his heart.<sup>19</sup>

There was an assembly of the East Asian Region of the FABC in March of 1979. This again assembly emphasized the urgency for dialogue.

The urgency to promote this dialogue is felt as we, the people of Asia, search for realization of those human values and

---

18. "Prayer – The Life of the Church of Asia. Statement and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly," 25 November 1978, Barrackpore, Calcutta, India, in FAPA I, 27-48.

19. "Prayer – The Life of the Church of Asia. Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly," n. 35-36.

ways of life that through the centuries have been presented and handed down by those great traditional religions.... Therefore we renew the call of the Church to our priests, religious and lay people to understand the purpose of interreligious dialogue, to promote it wherever the Spirit of God opens a door, and to become personally involved. The ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is an integral part of the Church's mission, especially in East Asia.<sup>20</sup>

The Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA) in June of 1979 also specifically mentioned the furthering of interreligious dialogue in their final statement.<sup>21</sup> They propose that the meaning of faith and service in daily life be a theme and a starting point for dialogue with other religions. "All mankind is rooted in the Christ-event. This anthropology is operative even in those who do not know Christ. Our main point of contact is the search for a new humanity and a new human family."<sup>22</sup>

## **2. Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) and the Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA)**

Planning for the Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs seriously began in October of 1978 after the OEIA executive committee meeting earlier that year when the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs sent another questionnaire to assess the state of interreligious dialogue and the needs to be addressed in the institutes.<sup>23</sup>

---

20. Poulet-Mathis, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia," 68.

21 "BISA V: Final Statement and Recommendations of the Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Action," 21 May to 1 June 1979, Baguio City, Philippines, in FAPA I, 217-221.

22 "BISA V: Final Statement and Recommendations of the Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Action," n. 30.

23. Poulet-Mathis, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia," 66-68.

The responses to the questionnaire “pointed out a general lack of interest for interreligious dialogue, especially at the grassroots level of the Church’s life in Asia. The two main reasons given for this lack of interest were: insufficient theological motivation, and lack of competent personnel engaged fulltime in this particular Church activity.”<sup>24</sup> These responses focused the BIRA on the practical pastoral activities needed for dialogue.

Beginning in 1979 two BIRA were to be held. There was one for bishops in countries with a Buddhist influence, and one for those bishops in countries with a Muslim influence. A third BIRA was planned at a later time bishops in counties with a major Hindu influence. Dialogue would be approached in a general way at the plenary assemblies but the focus of these meetings specifically on interreligious dialogue would be more particular to each of the major religious traditions.

- **2.1. BIRA I-II-III**
- **2.1.1. BIRA I**

BIRA I in October 11-18, 1979 dealt with dialogue with Buddhists.<sup>25</sup> The statement of the assembly offers a reading of the state of dialogue, theological reflections, pastoral orientations and recommendations. Buddhism while being expressed in a great variety of ways has molded cultural and personal values. The Church is a minority in a predominately Buddhist milieu. Relations between Catholics and Buddhists are seen as improving with more openness and contacts and a more positive mutual

---

24. Poulet-Mathis, “Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia,” 67.

25. “BIRA I: Statement of the First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs,” 18 October 1979, Sampran, Bangkok, Thailand, in FAPA I, 109-112. The Episcopal Conferences of Japan, Korea, the Republic of China, Sri Lanka, and Thailand and from Hong Kong and Macau participated.

appreciation. It is also acknowledged that very few of our churches are involved in dialogue. There are difficulties and obstacles from the past and a sense of mutual superiority. Dialogue is promoted by the challenge of the common desire for a more just and human society together with the process of inculturation and becoming a truly local church. Because of the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the Church feels moved to open itself to Buddhists in new ways. With respect the Church recognizes too that Buddhists wish to enter into dialogue so we can grow both together. The activity of the Spirit is recognized in the life of individual Buddhist and their religious life. We are enlightened in our relationship with other religions under the overall mystery of God's love and merciful plan of salvation. God's dialogue is in and through the Incarnate Word and the Church witnesses to this and at the same time, is evangelized in this process. Dialogue is intrinsic to the very life of the Church and is the essential mode of all evangelization. Dialogue contributes to mutual growth by the mutual sharing as partners who both are rooted in their own culture, history and time. Dialogue requires a spirit of humility, openness receptivity and especially, love for Buddhists and God's presence to us through them. While witnessing to the grace of Christ we place a priority on fellowship. The recommendations focused on what the bishops could do to encourage and promote dialogue through activities, offices, formation and catechesis concluding to "encourage dialogue as a component of parish life; promote friendship and collaboration in community-building in harmonious ways."<sup>26</sup>

---

26. "BIRA I: Statement of the First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs," 112.

### • 2.1.2. BIRA II

BIRA II in November 13-20, 1979 dealt with dialogue with Muslims.<sup>27</sup> The statement offered a reading of the situation, theological reflections, and pastoral orientations. They offered positive signs for dialogue such as eagerness to serve the one God, the search for moral truths, and religious renewal of both Muslims and Christians. They presented factors inhibiting dialogue such as negative attitudes, fear, prejudice, ignorance, a triumphalistic attitude of superiority, and the political implications as both “Islam and Christianity have genuine interest in influencing every aspect of man’s life.”<sup>28</sup> “In spite of these obstacles, there is a growing awareness on the part of Christians for the necessity of dialogue as an activity intrinsic to the Christian response to God’s message.”<sup>29</sup> The theological underpinnings are that the Church is the sacrament of God’s message in the world and continues Christ’s work of dialogue. “In dialogue, therefore, a Christian hopes that both he and his Muslim brother will turn anew to God’s kingdom, their own faiths richer by their mutual interchange, their mission to the world more fruitful by their shared insights and commitments.”<sup>30</sup>

One of the practical orientations suggested is the dialogue of life, the most essential aspect of dialogue, where in the daily practice of living together in brotherhood, helpfulness, and open heartedness, Muslims and Christians mutually witness to each other from the values found in their own faiths. There is a call

---

27 “BIRA II: Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs,” 20 November 1979, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in FAPA I, 113-117. The Episcopal Conferences of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand participated.

28 “BIRA II: Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs,” n. 8.

29. “BIRA II: Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs,” n. 9.

30. “BIRA II: Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs,” n. 13.

to work together for social justice and human rights. Christians are strongly encouraged to become more deeply involved in the dialogue of life. Another suggestion is formal dialogue in humility and openness to face issues that confront both Muslims and Christians by using the resources that come from their religious heritage. The third orientation is theological dialogue where areas of convergence and divergence are faced without an exaggeration of the differences. The fourth suggestion is the need for Christians to be educated about Islam, its basic beliefs and practices. Parents and all catechesis should teach about God's love for Muslims and the good and holy values in Islam. Bishops should teach by their own exemplary knowledge of Islam's teachings and foster friendly and sincere relations with Muslims. Bishops in their own diocese should provide training for priests, religious, and lay people in order that they can come to understand and respect Islam. Bishops Conferences should send people for specialized training in Muslim-Christian dialogue so that they can serve as animators in the area of each conference. Finally the ecumenical dimension of dialogue must not be forgotten. The statement concludes by saying that they are calling for dialogue. "This means a change of attitude towards Islam. In the past, the attitude of Christians towards Muslims has not always followed the example of love given by their teacher and savior, Jesus Christ."<sup>31</sup>

"Perhaps the most immediate result of the institutes was that the participants returned home confirmed in their commitment to dialogue and confident that their promising first effort 'among them' would mature, step by step, to a genuine dialogue 'with' their brothers and sisters of other faiths in full friendship."<sup>32</sup>

---

31. "BIRA II: Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs," n. 19.

32. Poulet-Mathis, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia," 71.

### • 2.1.3. BIRA III

BIRA III on November 14-21, 1982 dealt with dialogue with Hindus.<sup>33</sup> The statement offered a reading of the mission of the Church, the meaning of dialogue, the Asian situation, Hinduism and Christianity and recommendations. Dialogue and proclamation are seen as complementary. Mutual understanding and enrichment are promoted by dialogue in the common quest for a life of peace in freedom, fellowship and justice. Openness to the mystery of God's saving action in history is demanded by dialogue that encompasses all dimensions of life. The context of oppressive poverty and social conflicts leads people to search for their self-identity while longing for integral liberation. The key ideas of Hinduism were examined with their multiple effects, together with the popular religious culture to promote a radical transformation of society so as to promote the values of human dignity, and solidarity in building a new society with a culture of wholeness.

The assembly recommended that at all levels people be prepared for dialogue through instruction and training. This must include "the encouragement to a spirit of creative initiative and the promotion of a habit of prayer."<sup>34</sup> Popular level activities could include common celebrations of some festivals including prayer, reflections, discussions and live-ins. The promotion of freedom, equality, fellowship and justice can lead to "the eradication of social evils like caste, communalism, corruption

---

33. "BIRA III: Statement and Recommendations of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs," 20 November 1982, Madras, India, in FAPA I, 119-123. The Episcopal Conferences of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka participated.

34. "BIRA III: Statement and Recommendations of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs," Recommendation, 1.



and the exploitation of the weak.”<sup>35</sup> Inculturation is inseparable from dialogue. Ecumenical activity is encouraged too as it impacts dialogue.

• **2.1.3.1. Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia**

A consultation on Christian presence among Muslims in Asia was held by the FABC in Varanasi, India, in 1983 from November 26 to December 4.<sup>36</sup> This was sponsored by the FABC Office of Mission and the OEIA.

The final statement maintained that the reason Christians approach Muslims is because they are neighbors and that people through daily life mutually share with others what is most important. Religious experience calls for openness to the complementary elements of others' faith experience. “Without interpersonal and inter-group contacts we cannot share mutually the riches God has gifted to each individual and group.”<sup>37</sup> The Church believes that all are offered salvation in Jesus Christ, and this universal salvific will of God brings the affirmation of God's activity in other living faiths. Islam has a purpose in God's mysterious and providential plan. The Church will become more aware of the fullness of Christ's salvific work in its contact with people of other faiths, such as Muslims. Religious identity is never hidden in contacts on a religious basis or in encountering societal

---

35. “BIRA III: Statement and Recommendations of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs,” Recommendation, 3.

36. “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia, Message and Recommendations of the Participants of the Consultation,” 26 November 1983, Nav-Sadhana, Varanasi, India, in FAPA I, 165-173.

37. “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia, Message of the Participants of the Consultation,” n. 4.

problems. Poverty and religiosity are two realities in Asia. Human need should be a meeting point for Muslims and Christians.

Dialogue is essentially between persons, not systems....

This means that we encounter each Muslim as a fellow pilgrim on the path to God, rather than as a representative of a system of religious ideas.... The goal of this interpersonal dialogue is an enrichment which enables both participants to purify and deepen their respective faith commitments and thus become open to ever more abundant movements of God's grace.<sup>38</sup>

In minority and majority situations, both Muslims and Christians can be victims of injustice, intolerance, and greed. In the difficulties of living together two insights are offered. "Our commitment to dialogue is one which must transcend historical difficulties and vicissitudes."<sup>39</sup> "Muslim realities must not be compared with Christian ideals, or vice versa. We are all sinful, and must humbly confess how far short of our calling our actual behavior falls."<sup>40</sup> The Islamic revival and reform movements cause a concern for Christians and this needs to be pursued in dialogue with all segments of the Islamic community.

In the pastoral recommendations, the formation of a Christian community that knows well its own faith and the basic teachings of Islam is seen as fundamental for better Muslim-Christian relations. Much needs to be done to bring this formation to the entire community. Workshops and study sessions are needed to study dialogue in general and Muslim-Christian dialogue in particular to help overcome fears and prejudices. Dialogue should

---

38. "Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia, Message of the Participants of the Consultation," n. 15-16.

39. "Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia, Message of the Participants of the Consultation," n. 19.

40. "Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia, Message of the Participants of the Consultation," n. 23.

include study and collaboration to address the social issues. The role and position of women in society and the family should be studied and collaboration between Christian and Muslim women is welcomed. Sharing human sufferings and sorrow together with joy and celebrations evidences a fraternal relationship. Christians should show concern for Muslims in sickness, death, and suffering from natural disasters or social evils as part of being Christian. Christians should also share the joy of Muslim festivals, send greetings or accompany Muslims at births, marriages, and other celebrations. “Mary ... could be promoted as the patroness of unity and fellowship which should exist between Christians and Muslims.”<sup>41</sup> Daily prayer for love and understanding is urged for all Christians so that there will be mutual enrichment between Muslims and Christians.

## • **2.2. SIRA**

After BIRA II and before BIRA III there were two “Seminar for Interreligious Affairs” (SIRA). These pastoral programs brought together bishops and priests who were already committed to interreligious dialogue so that they could search together for better ways of enhancing the ministry of dialogue in the Asian Church. Specifically, the participants at the SIRA were charged with discovering ways in which they could assist the local Churches take up interreligious dialogue as a pastoral priority and to recommend areas where the Churches could work on renewal and reform. These were to look for ways to put into pastoral practice the suggestions from BIRA I and II.

---

41. “Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia, Recommendations of the Participants of the Consultation,” n. 6.

- **2.2.1. SIRA I**

SIRA I was held in Taipei, Taiwan from the 18th to the 23rd of November, 1980. There were 26 bishops and priests from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. “The participants insisted that all local churches should be given every encouragement and every possible help to prepare competent and responsible animators of dialogue: clergy, religious and laity deeply rooted in their Christian communities.”<sup>42</sup>

- **2.2.2. SIRA II**

SIRA II was held in 1982 from May 24 to 27 in Tamshuei, Taiwan. This was for the rectors of the seminaries of Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The participants indicated that dialogue is a life style that encompasses living in harmony with peoples of other faiths with an open attitude towards other religions that is expressed by the sharing religious experience and working together with them. The participants insisted that the seminaries and pastoral centers needed to be permeated with a spirit of dialogue.

- **2.3. BIRA IV**

- **2.3.1. BIRA IV/1**

BIRA IV/1 held in Thailand from October 23-30, 1984 was attended by the heads of ten of the national Episcopal commissions on interreligious affairs along with three representatives from the Vatican and a representative of the Christian Conference of

---

42. Poulet-Mathis, “Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia,” 71.

Asia (CCA).<sup>43</sup> The purpose of this assembly was to deepen the understanding of dialogue in the context of the mission of the Church and to plan for the coming years. The document of the then Secretariat for Non-Christians “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission (DM),” published on May 10 in 1984 was one of the principle basis for the discussion.

The theological and pastoral issues discussed were the theology of dialogue, dialogue and inculturation, prayer and worship, and involvement in dialogue. “A true metanoia regarding the importance of dialogue in the mission of the Church is one of the first goals to be attained if interreligious dialogue may ever become a reality. This affects both pastors and ordinary faithful. Measures should be taken to favor this change of heart and mind at the earliest possible time: the Church in Asia should move now.”<sup>44</sup>

A seven year plan of ten Bishops’ Institutes on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/1-10) was accepted. The plan was that each bishop in Asia would have the opportunity it attend at least one of the BIRA IV meetings.<sup>45</sup>

### • **2.3.2. BIRA IV/2**

BIRA IV/2 was held in Pattaya, Thailand in November 1985 and attended by representatives of the FABC member

---

43. “BIRA IV/1: Report on the Assembly of the First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” 23-30 October 1984, Sampran, Thailand, in FAPA I, 247-250.

44. “BIRA IV/1: Report on the Assembly of the First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” n. 19.

45. These did not work out as planned. The number was expanded to twelve, one was replaced by another meeting and two were cancelled. The final BIRA IV/12 was held in 1991. Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 210.

conferences.<sup>46</sup> The theme was: “The Church at the Service of God’s Reign.”

The statement discussed the situation and offered reflections centered on the Reign of God, the work of the Spirit, the Church and dialogue. “That this dialogue is based on the firm belief that the Holy Spirit is operative in other religions as well. ‘The Church is enriched through her encounter with them’ (*Redemptor Hominis*). That as a sign and instrument that reaches out, the Church is in dialogue with all of creation, with all peoples, with her own self and above all with God. In concrete this dialogue takes into account the totality of life.”<sup>47</sup> They envisioned interreligious dialogue becoming a reality at all levels.

The recommendations included formation programs for priests, religious and laity that be attentive to a spirituality that stresses dialogue. It was also recommended that “the formation of Basic Christian Communities ... should lead to the formation of Basic Human Communities. In this was the Church in Asia can truly become servant of all.”<sup>48</sup> Dialogue should be focused on person-oriented relationships. The suggested priorities were to set up pastoral centers for dialogue that coordinate with formation programs; to set up courses in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam with actual exposure to the reality of these other religions; to initiate interfaith meetings and sharing together with socio-economic and cultural projects.

---

46. “BIRA IV/2: Final Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” 17-22 November 1985, Pattaya, Thailand, in FAPA I, 251-255.

47. “BIRA IV/2: Final Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” Reflections, n. 5.

48. “BIRA IV/2: Final Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” Recommendations, n. 3.

### • **2.3.3. BIRA IV/3**

BIRA IV/3 was held in Hong Kong in November of 1986 and attended by bishops from nine of the FABC member conferences.<sup>49</sup> The theme for this meeting was: “Discerning the Spirit at work in and beyond the Church in Asia.”

The statement addressed the Asian realities, dialogue lead by the Spirit, signs of hope, to use the documents of Vatican II to reflect on the basic impulse of the Spirit to move into fellowship with all people, to deepen the understanding of the Spirit of God and on critical reflection based on a theology of the Spirit in relation to the events, encounters and movements in Asia. Pastoral guidelines were offered on faith so that all involved in will grow in faith and so enter into deeper fellowship and dialogue. We must empty ourselves to hear the Spirit speaking in dialogue. We need to pray for the gifts of the Spirit and that the gifts of the Spirit can be seen if they bear the fruits of the Spirit. Discernment is needed to authenticate encounters with the Spirit. A deeper knowledge of Asian faiths and ideologies is needed and this needs to be tied to theological reflection. All of this should lead us to the correct attitude to the working of the Spirit beyond the boundaries of the Church. There was an appeal to the Bishops of Asia to join in discerning the work of the Spirit and to see the call of the Spirit to a deeper understanding of mission through the forms of witness, service and dialogue.

### • **2.3.4. BIRA IV/4**

BIRA IV/4 was held in August of 1987 in Manila, Philippines, and was attended by eighteen bishops all from

---

49. “BIRA IV/3: Statement of the Fourth Bishops’ Institute of for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” 2-7 November 1986, Hong Kong, in FAPA I, 257-261.

the Philippines.<sup>50</sup> The theme was: “Theology of Dialogue: The Contribution of the Church in the Philippines to Interreligious Dialogue in Asia.”

The bishops address their reflections to the Christian communities in the Philippines and in all of Asia and see these as the contribution of the Church in the Philippines to interreligious dialogue in Asia. Interreligious dialogue is linked to the very nature and being of the Church.

For us interreligious dialogue flows from the nature of the Church, a community in pilgrimage journeying with peoples of other faiths towards the Kingdom that is to come (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1). Interreligious dialogue is an ongoing process of common search for mutual understanding and trust, leading us, and our fellow pilgrims, towards a deeper appreciation of truth – the truth about God and the human person.<sup>51</sup>

Partners in dialogue should work to build a pluralist society where, in love and justice, people of diverse faiths and cultures can live together in peace. Bitter religious divisions emanate from absolute claims to the truth, proselytism, aggressive attitudes, and militancy. Lack of mutual knowledge, distorted understandings, prejudices, and distrust characterize interreligious relations. Therefore, indispensable for dialogue are openness, mutual respect, sincerity, humility, and honesty. The dialogue of life should be promoted.

The bishops declared that in the Philippines catechesis and value-formation are needed to prepare all of the faithful to enter

---

50. “BIRA IV/4: Statement of the Fourth Bishops’ Institute of for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” 29-31 August 1987, Manila, Philippines, in FAPA I, 299-301. Thirty-six bishops were to attend but there was a kudeta on August 27 and many bishops could not leave their dioceses so the number was reduced to eighteen. Poulet-Mathis, “Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia,” 83-84.

51. “BIRA IV/4: Statement of the Fourth Bishops’ Institute of for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” n. 2.



into interreligious dialogue. This formation should also lead to interreligious cooperation for the transformation of society. The bishops admit that they need to review their own commitment to interreligious dialogue in light of the current issues with their Muslim neighbors and to set up a special episcopal committee to promote Muslim-Christian dialogue. They conclude by expressing their hope and their commitment to interreligious dialogue in the face of serious obstacles.<sup>52</sup>

### • **2.3.5. BIRA IV/6**

BIRA IV/6 was held in Singapore in July of 1987.<sup>53</sup> It has also been called the “Joint FABC-CCA Consultation.”<sup>54</sup> There were 55 participants from 14 countries. There were 24 Catholic bishops from twelve countries and 14 CCA delegates from eleven countries together with 17 resource people, 12 from the FABC and 5 from the CCA. This was the first such joint initiative of the CCA/FABC. The theme was: “Living and Working together with Sisters and Brothers of other Faiths in Asia.”

The statement asserted that in the presence of diverse religious traditions and ideologies, together with widespread poverty and political oppression with the politicalization of religions dialogue is a priority of the Churches. “Dialogue ... is not primarily a matter of talking. It is, in the first instance, an attitude, an openness to the neighbor, a sharing of spiritual

---

52. BIRA IV/5 was replaced by a four day “Living Together with Greater Harmony” organized by the Dialogue Commission of the Bishops’ Conference of India. See FAPA I, 229.

53. “BIRA IV/6: Statement of the Sixth Bishops’ Institute of for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” 5-10 July 1987, Singapore, in FAPA I, 303-305. This preceded the postponed BIRA IV/4.

54. Poulet-Mathis, “Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue in Asia,” 81. On page 81 it is stated that this Joint FABC-CCA Consultation replaced BIRA IV/6 but later on page 89 it is stated that BIRA IV/7 was a continuation of BIRA IV/6.

resources as people stand before the great crises of life and death.”<sup>55</sup> Amidst the different nuances and understandings among Christians, dialogue and mission were affirmed as having their own integrity. God’s activity is first and we participate in God’s continuing activity through the Spirit. All humanity is on a shared pilgrimage and dialogue offers a chance for Christian witness.

“Dialogue is a lifestyle, which can be learned only by doing.”<sup>56</sup> Participation in and the theology of interreligious dialogue needs to be taken seriously by those in leadership positions in the churches. Course on the theology of interreligious dialogue and the other religions need to be included in all formation and bishops and clergy need to be updated on this too. It was recommended that a commission on interreligious dialogue be established at various levels and this should be done in an ecumenical spirit. Interreligious gatherings should be encouraged. Guidelines should be distributed widely and revised as needed. Thought should be given to the issues of mixed marriages and funeral services for a multi-religious family. Fundamentalism and fanaticism need to be addressed.

• **2.3.6. BIRA IV/7**

BIRA IV/7 was held in Tagaytay City, Philippines from October 28 to November 3, 1988.<sup>57</sup> It was attended by 26 bishops from 7 of the member conferences of the FACB and a fraternal

---

55. “BIRA IV/6: Statement of the Sixth Bishops’ Institute of for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” Statement, n. 3.

56. “BIRA IV/6: Statement of the Sixth Bishops’ Institute of for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” Pastoral Recommendations, 304.

57. “BIRA IV/7: Statement of the Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” 28 October-3 November, 1988, Tagaytay City, Philippines, in FAPA I, 307-312. This was preceded by BIRA IV/10-11 which were earlier in the year.

delegate from the CCA. This was a continuation of the reflection begun in BIRA IV/6 under the theme: “Living and Working together with Sisters and Brothers of other Faiths in Asia.”

The statement of the assembly gave attention to the socio-political context of dialogue, the challenges to dialogue particularly to fundamentalism, commitment to dialogue, proclamation and dialogue from the Spirit, and the spirituality of dialogue in difficult and painful situations. “Dialogue means powerlessness and vulnerability. From a position of power, one can only negotiate about terms. From a position of weakness, one can truly communicate his or her trust in the other. Trust is most real when there looms the possibility of betrayal. To dialogue means to open one’s heart and to speak one’s mind with courage and respect.... The Spirit has often used powerlessness and vulnerability to effect mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.... Dialogue demands a deep spirituality, which enables man, as did Jesus Christ, to hang on to his faith in God’s love even when everything seems to fall apart. Dialogue finally demands a total Christ-like self-emptying so that, led by the Spirit, we may be more effective instruments in building up God’s kingdom.”<sup>58</sup>

One pastoral recommendation was about inculturation and dialogue. “Often it is a lack of understanding and attuning to culture, language and genius of the people, which is the cause for the lack of interest and involvement in dialogue.”<sup>59</sup> Also the understanding and appreciation of the spirituality of the peoples of other faiths is necessary for dialogue. Centers should also provide an opportunity for believers to meet and share their spiritual

---

58. “BIRA IV/7: Statement of the Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” Statement n. 15-16.

59. “BIRA IV/7: Statement of the Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” Pastoral Recommendations n. 1.

experiences. In addition, in the socio-political context, the place of religions and the need to have harmony among religions in order to have peace in society should be an impetus to provide the skills for interreligious dialogue at the grassroots level. We also need to honestly examine ourselves for our responsibility for conflict and disharmony among religious groups.<sup>60</sup>

• **2.3.7. BIRA IV/10**

BIRA IV/10 was held in Sukabumi, Indonesia at the end of June of 1988.<sup>61</sup> It was attended by delegates of the Bishops' Conferences of Indonesia, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The theme of the assembly was the: "Theology of Harmony."

The assembly considered that cultures live the realities of order, justice and love differently. We need to understand and appreciate this diversity critically. More involvement in transforming social structures is needed to achieve harmony. Our resources are in our Christian tradition but we also need to harness the resources in other faiths for mutual enrichment. "Social justice is integral to creating harmony. It has become a priority of the whole Church. Our task entails also building awareness among peoples of its absolute necessity."<sup>62</sup> This will mean preparing, educating and encouraging all to promote harmony.

---

60. BIRA IV/8-9 were cancelled.

61. "BIRA IV/10: Final Statement of the Tenth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue," 24-30 June, 1988, Sukabumi, Indonesia in FAPA I, 313-315.

62. "BIRA IV/10: Final Statement of the Tenth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue," n. 11.

### • **2.3.8. BIRA IV/11**

BIRA IV/11 was also held in Sukabumi, Indonesia in early July 1988 right after BIRA IV/10 with the same resources persons.<sup>63</sup> Delegates from the Bishops' Conferences of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand benefited from the deliberations of their brother bishops at BIRA IV/10 and reflected on the same theme: "Theology of Harmony."

The assembly reflected on the forces of fragmentation, the sources of harmony with the resources from Asian Traditions and the sources of inspiration. Among the common concerns for harmony is interreligious harmony. "Peace, harmony, fellowship and cooperation among religions seem to be a sure way for peace and harmony in our Asian Societies."<sup>64</sup> Harmony will entail attitudinal changes too.

An emphasis on contemplation and ascetical practices in Christian life can contribute to union with God that can lead to inner peace and a heart open to love mercy and forgiveness. Christians can learn from other religious traditions. Respect for nature and harmony and balance in the ecosystem can be an issue for collaboration with others. Matters pertaining to peace, justice and unity need to be approached from a faith perspective together with people of other faiths. In dialogue Christians and others need to express in their daily life what unites people of all religions.

---

63. "BIRA IV/11: Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue," 1-7 July, 1988, Sukabumi, Indonesia in FAPA I, 317-324.

64. "BIRA IV/11: Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue," Statement n. 16.

- **2.3.8.1. *Joint Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue-OEIA Consultation***

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the executive committee of the OEIA together with resource persons and Asian theologians met from September 23 to 29, 1988 in Hua Hin, Thailand. This was jointly convened by the PCID and the OEIA. A fraternal delegate of the CCA was also present. The consultation was to explore dialogue in the different countries of Asia, to examine the theological foundations of dialogue and to investigate ways for increased cooperation. While there were obvious differences among the different countries, it was affirmed that interreligious dialogue was a task of the universal Church and that is to be situated within the total mission of the Church. This task is to be fulfilled by each community of the faithful and it is to be person-centered. It needs to be carried out in intra-religious dialogue.

- **2.3.9. BIRA IV/12**

BIRA IV/12 was held in Hua Hin, Thailand, in February 1991.<sup>65</sup> This was sponsored by the OEIA and the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC.<sup>66</sup> Forty-eight people gathered coming from the bishops, priests and laity of eleven countries in Asia together with the staff and consultants of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and some delegates from the CCA and the World Council of Churches (WCC). The

---

65. "BIRA IV/12: Final Statement of the Twelfth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue," 21-26 February 1991, Hua Hin, Thailand, n. 52, in FAPA I, 325-334.

66. In 1996 the TAC became the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) as the FABC systematized their structure and all of the different areas of concern were known as offices.

objective was to deepen the insights from all of the BIRA and in particular for all of the BIRA IV assemblies, and to search for new horizons and plan for the expanding of interreligious dialogue into all areas of the Church's life.

One insight is “the realization that the religions of Asia have a crucial role to play in God’s great enterprise to bring peace, communion and a more humane way of life to all peoples in Asia, indeed to the whole human family.”<sup>67</sup> They reflected on God’s dream of the fullness of life amidst the threats to life realizing that we face the threats together in the dialogue of life. The dialogue of life begins in each local community and is the prime agent of this dialogue. The dialogue of life needs to become a dialogue of faith that breathes new life into spiritual values. A spirituality of dialogue is implied in such a dialogue of life and faith. “Christian spirituality is at heart a spirituality of dialogue.... It thus lays the foundation for unity between God and humankind.... Spirituality of dialogue is a transformative spirituality. Transforming our life, conforming it more and more to the Image of Christ, it realizes gradually the transformation of the society, giving birth to a new humanity in Christ.”<sup>68</sup> Dialogue calls for a real entry into the language of the other. Dialogue calls us into a new way of being Church. “The Churches of Asia have a contribution to make to the life of the universal Church.... It has been suggested that Asia can contribute a theology of harmony. But the potential contribution goes farther than this. It lies precisely in the interconnectedness of these issues – of harmony (which is the fruit of dialogue), of the search for a more human society, of inculturation, of spirituality.”<sup>69</sup>

---

67. “BIRA IV/12: Final Statement of the Twelfth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” n. 9.

68. “BIRA IV/12: Final Statement of the Twelfth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” n. 36, 39.

69. “BIRA IV/12: Final Statement of the Twelfth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” n. 52.

- **2.4. BIRA V**

The BIRA IV/1 meeting of 1984 discussed harmony and indicated that a “study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context leading to interreligious dialogue appeared clear to us.”<sup>70</sup> BIRA IV/12 in 1991 again mentioned that Asia should contribute to the theology of harmony as the fruit of dialogue. Harmony then became the theme of the BIRA V meetings. These were five meetings. BIRA V/1 dealt with Muslims, BIRA V/2 with Buddhists, BIRA V/3 with Hindus, BIRA V/4 with Taoists and Confucians, and BIRA V/5 was an evaluation of the all of the BIRA V meetings.

- **2.4.1. BIRA V/1**

BIRA V/1 was about Muslim-Christian dialogue.<sup>71</sup> This was held in Pakistan on October 19-24, 1992. New at this meeting was the participation of both Muslims and Christians. Nine Muslims and twenty-seven Christians were present. The theme was: “Working Together for Harmony in God’s World.”

Harmony is understood as the presence in human interaction of order, well-being, justice, and love. Cultures have a diversity of expressions of these realities based on their historically developed value systems. Nature as God’s creation speaks of harmony and this should lead to a harmony of hearts and relationships. Islam and Christianity have both common and divergent viewpoints. In dialogue, Muslims and Christians strive together to understand the will of God for themselves and all humankind.

---

70. “BIRA IV/1: Report on the Assembly of the First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” n. 13.

71. “BIRA V/1: Working Together for Harmony in God’s World,” 24 October 1992, Pakistan, in FAPA II, 143-147.



There are both signs of hope and obstacles. Often the grassroots level of dialogue is not given enough emphasis. Each side maintains its own perspective and does not understand the perspective of the other. There is a narrowness of concern with each one's own community. Politically and historically, much mistrust has grown between people of each faith so much so that harmonious and peaceful living together of people of different faiths is hindered by the present religio-political and socio-economic situation.

Hope is found in the starting point and strength of dialogue, God the creator of all. Humble prayer and union with God leads to an appreciation of dialogue and the other. The example of holy people who have been committed to dialogue and the awareness of the other's religion is an inspiration and an impetus to promote harmonious living together. "The respect for the other as other and the acceptance of the other as other will help us to grow as brothers and sisters."<sup>72</sup> Dialogue has helped each to rediscover their identities, to respect these identities, and to purify the motivation for dialogue.

Dialogue calls for forgiveness and reconciliation. While the daily living of faith on the local level is where grassroots dialogue takes place, the implication of the importance of this dialogue is much wider. "We believe that dialogue between Muslims and Christians will gain in strength and will contribute to the achievement of a harmonious society.... As Christians and Muslims, who together constitute a large part of our world population, we have come to realize the important role we play in promoting religious harmony in the world."<sup>73</sup>

---

72. "BIRA V/1: Working Together for Harmony in God's World," 145.

73. "BIRA V/1: Working Together for Harmony in God's World," 146.

The primary recommendation of this meeting was a real deepening in each one of his or her faith in God that will enable each to see the other as a true brother and sister. To this end they recommend interfaith studies and reflection with the primacy of the grassroots dialogue of life. Concern for the poor and the oppressed and the integrity of creation are areas for dialogue. To advance religious harmony there should be a rediscovery of a common cultural and spiritual heritage.

• **2.4.2. BIRA V/2**

BIRA V/2 was held in Thailand in April 25-29, 1994.<sup>74</sup> It was a gathering of sixty Buddhists and Christians who focused on the theme: “Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World.”

These Buddhists and Christians in dialogue reflected on the Asian situation in both its positive and negative aspects, the impact of technology and media on cultural and religiously diverse Asia. They examined a vision of harmony. “Harmony can be 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 is perceived as the ultimate goal in life.”<sup>75</sup> Acknowledging that Buddhists and Christians differ in their

---

74. “BIRA V/2: Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World,” 29 April 1994, Thailand, in FAPA II, 149-153.

75. “BIRA V/2: Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World,” n. 3.2.

analysis of the causes of disharmony, they recognized a common concern for the people of the world in their suffering and oppression and from that offered a call to harmony and a call to action. While recognizing the needs for mutual education and collaboration, they also mentioned a need for a change of attitudes and mind on the personal level and the need to encourage dialogue at the level of spiritual experience.

### • **2.4.3. BIRA V/3**

BIRA V/3 was held in New Delhi, India in from October 24 to 28, 1995.<sup>76</sup> It was a gathering of sixty Hindus and Christians who focused on the theme: “Working Together for Harmony in the Contemporary World.”

They expressed the plurality of reality. “There is a rich pluralism in nature and human society.... The continual search for wholeness and unity in life is a constituent feature of all religions. There is an ineffable and universal rhythm that unifies everything into an organic whole which binds together pluralistic reality.”<sup>77</sup> The major areas of disharmony were explored but they asserted that: “We are convinced that religious experiences and expressions can play a significant role in bringing about a deeply rooted culture of harmony. Through interreligious dialogue, the liberative and unifying potential of each religion is to be articulated and made effective for integral transformation.”<sup>78</sup> The reflections also examined the Hindu perception of harmony and the Christian perception of harmony in order to clarify what harmony is and what it is not. Among the steps toward working for a culture of

---

76. “BIRA V/3: Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World,” 28 October 1995, New Delhi, India, in FAPA II, 155-160.

77. “BIRA V/3: Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World,” n 1.

78. “BIRA V/3: Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World,” n 3.

harmony they noted that: “Friendships and mutual trust are the starting points for building harmony. Therefore it is necessary to organize in every village/township interreligious friendships groups ... which promote interpersonal relations and interreligious understanding and cooperation.”<sup>79</sup>

• **2.4.4. BIRA V/4**

BIRA V/4 was held in Taiwan from 15-19 of April 1996.<sup>80</sup> There were 52 participants from 10 Asian nations who reflected on the theme: “Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia: Christians in Dialogue with Confucian Thought and Taoist Spirituality.”

The contribution to harmony from Confucianism begins with benevolence that is the core of the human being. “Confucianism, a discipline that may be called the ‘learning of life,’ puts special emphasis on the cultivation of one’s own self.... Through self-reflection and self-realization, one can possess a loving heart, extending from the individual to others, until finally all people of the world are embraced in harmony.”<sup>81</sup> The Confucian emphasis is on social stability. The Taoist contribution to harmony is that it focuses on the interior path towards harmony with Nature or the Tao. “In Taoism, whether it be philosophical or religious, harmony is the most important goal to be achieved.... The Tao is perhaps the most perfect symbol of establishing harmony of the

---

79. “BIRA V/3: Working Together for Harmony in Our Contemporary World,” n 8.5.

80. “BIRA V/4: Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia: Christians in Dialogue with Confucian Thought and Taoist Spirituality,” 19 April 1996, Taiwan, R.O.C., in FAPA II, 161-165.

81. “BIRA V/4: Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia: Christians in Dialogue with Confucian Thought and Taoist Spirituality,” n. 2.

two generative forces in the universe, yin and yang.”<sup>82</sup> Elements of both Confucianism and Taoist are blended together at the level of popular belief. “In practice, popular belief provides the emotional and religious needs of the human person. To its adherents, the rituals and ceremonies of popular religion help to bring about [harmony] in the individual, within the community, and between the individual and nature.”<sup>83</sup> The Christian contribution to harmony lies in the relationship offered by a personal God in the person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. “The Christian filial relationship with God necessarily implies relationship with others as brothers and sisters. For this reason, the one commandment of love bears a twofold aspect: love of God and love of neighbor.”<sup>84</sup> In dialogue all can be enriched by the insights of the other on the path to harmony.

#### • 2.4.5. BIRA V/5

BIRA V/5 was held between October 27 and November 1, 1996 in Bali, Indonesia.<sup>85</sup> There were 47 participants from 15 Asian countries and the Vatican. These included Buddhists, Catholics, Hindus and Muslims and scholars of the Confucian and Taoist traditions. There were also participants from the CCA. The theme was: “Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue (Evaluation of the BIRA V Encounters).”

---

82. “BIRA V/4: Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia: Christians in Dialogue with Confucian Thought and Taoist Spirituality,” n. 3.

83. “BIRA V/4: Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia: Christians in Dialogue with Confucian Thought and Taoist Spirituality,” n. 4.

84. “BIRA V/4: Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia: Christians in Dialogue with Confucian Thought and Taoist Spirituality,” n. 5.

85. “BIRA V/5: Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue (Evaluation of the BIRA V Encounters),” 27 October-1 November, 1996, Bali, Indonesia, in FAPA II, 167-171.

Most of these participants had taken part in one of the BIRA V seminars. It was acknowledged that these seminars followed upon the BIRA I-IV that focused on educating the bishops about dialogue and its theological foundations. BIRA V was oriented to the bringing together of the followers of other religions to study together the contributions each can make to harmony in society.

The overall impression was rather positive. The fact that believers of the various religions could listen to one another in respect and appreciation was a sign of hope. Positive also was the getting to know more deeply the believers on other religions and their sensitivities. This became an opportunity for personal growth. It was noted that since the theme was harmony, the more positive aspects of each religion were given emphasis. For the future it was suggested that attention be given to the obstacles to dialogue, elements of the religions that produce disharmony and conflict need to be addressed. It was also suggested that more time be given to discussion. The assembly also discussed the types of dialogue, the dialogue of life, of action, of exchange among scholars and religious experience. It was encouraged that in the future more emphasis be given to full interreligious participation at all levels from the planning to the actual holding of seminars.

Several common criticisms were acknowledged. One is that too few people participate so there is minimal impact on society. Second is a lack of follow-up after the encounters. Third is the feeling that since these are among leaders or scholars, the concerns of ordinary believers are not expressed. The effects of these types of gatherings need to reach the grassroots. It was suggested that there be a better use of the communications media. Follow-up too could include newsletters on the local level and the production of materials for dialogue. Follow-up too needs to rely on structures of an effective dialogue network at the local level. "The grassroots can be reached through participation in feasts and religious celebrations, interreligious pilgrimage tours, exposure of

students to places of worship of others, and through non-formal means of education to foster esteem for other believers.”<sup>86</sup>

The topic of praying together was discussed. “Some participants held that listening in respectful silence to prayers and readings of the Holy Books of others was a form of prayer acceptable to most believers in Asia.”<sup>87</sup> Finally the hope was expressed that the commitment to dialogue would grow and expand in the future.

#### • ***2.4.5.1. Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia***

Together with the FABC, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1994 organized a seminar on harmony among Christians and Muslims attended by Muslims and Christians from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines.<sup>88</sup>

The report stated that there is a need for ongoing dialogue. “The objective of dialogue is to increase understanding, respect and collaboration between the followers of Christianity and Islam.... If dialogue is to be truly effective in building more harmonious and just societies, it must reach the grass-roots and correct the misconceptions which each community has of the other.”<sup>89</sup> A unity of values and perceptions can be noticed in the

---

86. “BIRA V/5: Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue (Evaluation of the BIRA V Encounters),” n. 14.

87. “BIRA V/5: Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue (Evaluation of the BIRA V Encounters),” n. 16.

88. “Harmony Among Believers of Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia, Concluding Report of the Meeting,” 5 August 1994, Thailand, in FAPA II, 173-177. Felix Machado, “Harmony Among Believers of the Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia,” *Pro Dialogo Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones* 85-86 (1994): 216-218.

89. “Harmony Among Believers of Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia, Concluding Report of the Meeting,” n. 4.

midst of the admitted plurality and diversity of religions, ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. The process of modernization causing rapid change in society with secularization and individualism is a challenge for believers in God. The polarization among religious and ethnic groups is increasing.

Misconceptions, prejudices, lack of knowledge, and fears are obstacles to dialogue. Indifference or skepticism to dialogue is caused by the fear that dialogue will dilute religious conviction and zeal, and that it will lead to conversions. Fear is based on history, ethnic roots, and the minority-majority relationship of domination. Dialogue must be affirmed and encouraged, and it is necessary that people be firmly grounded their own faith and practice. While religion is meant to be a force for harmony in society and not a cause of conflict, there is a concern that exclusivist and extremist trends can lead to violence.

Interreligious dialogue should build communal harmony, mutual respect, and justice and do away with suspicion, exploitation, and conflict. “Interreligious dialogue is an ally of our governments in their desire to build a pluralistic society where people of different races, languages, cultures, and religions can live together in peace and harmony.”<sup>90</sup>

- **2.5. *Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA)***

The Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA) programs were the next primary activities of the OEIA. In this new phase of the FABC-OEIA’s service to the Church in Asia, the focus was formation of middle-level Church leaders. Specially, the target groups of the formation programs were those in positions

---

90. “Harmony Among Believers of Living Faiths: Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia, Concluding Report of the Meeting,” n. 14.



of responsibility and influence, such as teachers, pastoral workers, youth leaders, catechists, parish priests, etc.

- **2.5.1. FIRA I**

FIRA I was held in September 1998 in Malaysia.<sup>91</sup> Seventy delegates from nine countries participated to reflect and learn about dialogue with the view to formation for dialogue. These included bishops, priests, religious, ministers, parents, students and teachers. In addition to recommendations on a personal level including growth, prayer and spirituality, there were recommendations such as “to promote interreligious dialogue at the local level, we encourage the forming of Basic Human Communities, composed of adherents of various faith traditions and having a common concern and goal of living together in brotherhood which can work together to promote peace through dialogue.”<sup>92</sup> This includes serious study and reflection. This can be enhanced by an information exchange here in Asia and with the other local Churches of the world.

- **2.5.2. FIRA II**

FIRA II was held in July of 1999 in Pattaya, Thailand around the theme of Christian Discipleship.<sup>93</sup> There were 92 participants from 11 countries. They reflected on their experience and then reflected theologically about the mission of the Church and dialogue. “Our Asian context has enabled and compelled us to realize the truth and demands of Pope Paul VI announcement

---

91. “First Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA I): Final Statement,” 6-14 September, 1998, Ipoh, Malaysia, in FAPA III, 119-124.

92. “First Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA I): Final Statement,” n. 3.4

93. “Second Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA II): Final Statement,” 8-13 July, 1999, Pattaya, Thailand, in FAPA III, 125-132.

that dialogue is the new way of being Church.... Dialogue is not merely one ecclesial activity among many. It is a constituent dimension of every authentic local Church.... To be Church means to be a faith community-in-dialogue.”<sup>94</sup> They expressed the need of formation for interreligious dialogue. Formation programs were recommended. Courses on interreligious dialogue should be offered in universities and houses of formation. “Catholics need to be conscientized through talks by representatives of other religions.”<sup>95</sup> A spirituality of dialogue is needed in order to develop a healthy dialogue. Integral evangelization too will come from this spirituality.

• **2.5.3. FIRA III**

FIRA III was a youth leadership training held in Dong Zen Buddhist Monastery in Malaysia in October of 2000.<sup>96</sup> There were 46 participants from 13 counties. The experience of being guests in a Buddhist monastery was an important part of the experience to learn to be sensitive and respect other religions. “We were made aware of the complexities of interreligious dialogue and of the importance of formation and preparations.... The focus of FIRA III was on both the content and the process.”<sup>97</sup> One observation was that due to lack of proper formation, at the grassroots level many are unaware of Church teaching about interreligious dialogue. “We are mindful that living as Christians in the Asia requires a contextualized response to the Asian realities of poverty and religious pluralism. We, therefore, commit ourselves to further

---

94. “Second Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA II): Final Statement,” n. 3.7.

95. “Second Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA II): Final Statement,” n. 4.3.

96. “Third Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA III): Final Statement,” 3-10 October, 2000, Dong Zen Buddhist Monastery, Jenjarom, Malaysia, in FAPA III, 133-138.

97. “Third Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA III): Final Statement,” n. 2.3.

formation and updating on the teachings of the Church, especially with regard to Church documents which encourage interreligious dialogue, and to the re-reading and re-understanding of the Bible in the context of Asian theologies.”<sup>98</sup> It was also recommended that there be more dialogue centers and more resource materials that can be used at all levels of catechesis and religious education in parishes, schools and seminaries.

#### • **2.5.4. FIRA IV**

FIRA IV was a bishops’ leadership seminar held in Thailand in 2001.<sup>99</sup> This was specifically for the training of new and/ or young bishops. Participants first shared how they engage in interreligious dialogue in their own dioceses. This sharing affirmed that the dialogue of life is central to Christian life in Asia and a way to witness Gospel values. “Interreligious dialogue cannot be separated from intercultural dialogue and solidarity with the poor and oppressed.”<sup>100</sup> “The dialogue of prayer and spirituality is highly valued. Prayer together ... is an occasion for Christians and followers of other faiths to appreciate the spiritual riches which each group possesses, as well as to grow in respect for one another as fellow pilgrims on the path through life. Human solidarity is deepened when people approach the divine as one human family.”<sup>101</sup> The seminar also considered the document *Dominus Iesus*, noting that it affirms that interreligious dialogue is integral to the evangelizing mission of the Church while also suggesting a process of consultation for such documents. They proposed that

---

98. “Third Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA III): Final Statement,” n. 5.2.

99. “Fourth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA IV): Final Statement,” 20-25 August, 2001, Pattaya, Thailand, in FAPA III, 139-145.

100. “Fourth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA IV): Final Statement,” n. 5.

101. “Fourth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA IV): Final Statement,” n. 8.

in their local Churches they would promote a culture of dialogue. Each diocese is called upon to “establish a center for interreligious dialogue, or at least appoint a competent person in charge of promoting interreligious dialogue in the diocese. In cooperation with parishes, religious communities and institutions, the centers should organize training courses, sessions of dialogue and interfaith prayer meetings at various levels.”<sup>102</sup> Courses should be offered on other religions and interreligious dialogue in seminaries and formation institutes. “The culture of dialogue should grow from below. Basic Human/Christian Communities should be used as springboards for the promotion of the dialogue of life.”<sup>103</sup>

• **2.5.5. FIRA V**

FIRA V was organized around the theme of “Interreligious Dialogue in Religious Education.”<sup>104</sup> This was held in Bangkok on May of 2004. There were 70 Church members from 10 Asian countries and Australia who attended. The participants included bishops, priests, religious and lay who were young, middle aged and seniors who were also catechists, youth formators, seminary professors and college lecturers. Their focus was on how to prepare Catholics to become persons of interreligious dialogue.

It was noted that most Christians are involved in the dialogue of life with their neighbors of other religions. However they also observed that “structurally, there is an insufficient and

---

102. “Fourth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA IV): Final Statement,” n. 21 (i).

103. “Fourth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA IV): Final Statement,” n. 21 (v).

104. “Fifth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA V): Interreligious Dialogue in Religious Education,” 23-29 May, 2004, Bangkok, Thailand, in FAPA IV, 197-203.

coordinated effort to promote interreligious dialogue in most Asian Churches. The religious education offered by the Church does not seem to prepare its members for the task of dialogue. These even tend to be too Church-centered and focused primarily on Christian doctrines, oftentimes to the exclusion of any understanding or appreciation of other religions.”<sup>105</sup> The Church must more actively promote interreligious dialogue and make it a regular part of religious education and formation. Catholics need to be made aware of Church teaching on dialogue and they need information. “This calls for more effective and strategic formation of Catholics: children, youth, adults, catechists, seminarians, priests, religious, school teachers, parish ministers, etc.”<sup>106</sup> Interreligious dialogue must be completely integrated into all religious education and theological studies. “The topic of interreligious dialogue will no longer be an appendix or supplement.”<sup>107</sup> They also said that the understanding of interreligious dialogue is still at its beginning. They called for research to deepen understanding and to inform involvement in this. Another major concern was the lack of resource materials to promote interreligious dialogue and for use in formation programs. The production of these materials has to be given a priority. Networking is also needed.

• **2.6. *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: AMAN – CCA – FABC***

A conference was held in Bangkok on December 8-14, 2003 on the theme: “Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Conflict

---

105. “Fifth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA V): Interreligious Dialogue in Religious Education,” n. 7.

106. “Fifth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA V): Interreligious Dialogue in Religious Education,” n. 16 (iii).

107. “Fifth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA V): Interreligious Dialogue in Religious Education,” n. 16 (iv).

Transformation and the Study of Peace.” This Conference was organized by the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).<sup>108</sup> This conference called for a collective inter-faith response to concrete issues and getting people to train other people in peace studies and conflict transformation.

- **2.7. Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU)**

- **2.7.1. Ratification of the Hua Hin Agreement**

A significant event in ecumenical relations in Asia occurred in September 20-24, 1993 when a Joint FABC-CCA Task Force met in Hua Hin, Thailand and signed an agreement. This meeting was also called the Asian Ecumenical Encounter. The agreement was approved by FABC in January, 1995 at the Plenary Assembly in Manila, Philippines and by CCA in June, 1995 at the General Assembly in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The agreement approved the plan for the formation of an Asian Ecumenical Committee (AEC) with equal members from the CCA and FABC. This agreement called for further consultation and collaboration in ecumenical endeavors.

- **2.7.2. AMCU I**

On 12-15 March 1996, the FABC and the CCA held an ecumenical consultation, Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU I), Hong Kong.<sup>109</sup> The theme was the “Theology of Ecumenism.” Taking part were 42 participants from 15 Asian

---

108. See 2.9 below Asian Ecumenical Committee.

109. “Our Pilgrimage of Hope: Statement of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity,” 12-15 March 1996, Hong Kong, in FAPA II, 179-182.

countries and delegates from the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The consultation studied the theology of ecumenism, the vision of Christian Unity, and ways to build on what unites Christians and to overcome what divides. The participants looked for practical ways to work for unity in Asia and committed themselves to a wide range of programs aimed at fostering unity. They called for the early formation of the Asian Ecumenical Committee (AEC).

• **2.7.3. AMCU II**

AMCU II was held in Bali, Indonesia from the 10th –13th of January 1998 with 48 participants from 15 Asian countries. The participants were equally divided between those representing the more than 120 member Churches and Synods of the CCA and Roman Catholics who came from the Episcopal Conferences of FABC. The theme was: “Ecumenical Formation as the Churches of Asia move towards the Next Millennium.”

The main focus of AMCU II was the preparation of ecumenical teams who could give ecumenical formation courses at the local and national levels. Suggestions were made for setting up ecumenical formation courses with reference to available theological and worship resources for conducting seminars of ecumenical formation. Ecumenical formation should be done ecumenically where the participation of each partner is equal. Various speakers from the FABC and CCA presented the context for ecumenical formation as the Churches of Asia looks forward towards the 21st Century.

• **2.7.4. AMCU III**

The third seminar of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU III) brought some 50 participants, including

senior representatives of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 27 to February 1, 2001.<sup>110</sup> Its theme “Giving Shape to a New Ecumenical Vision in Asia” echoed the encouragement given by the CCA (at its two most recent assemblies) and by Pope John Paul II (in his 1999 Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 30), that our churches should enter into a process of prayer and discussion to explore the possibilities of new ecumenical structures and associations for promoting Christian unity. The question was raised about a regional ecumenical body or structure in addition to those at the local and national levels.

#### • **2.7.5. AMCU IV**

The Fourth seminar of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU IV) was held on 11 to 14 June 2007 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 24 participants, representing the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA), took part.<sup>111</sup> The theme was: “Our Common Witness in Contemporary Asia.” This focused on the importance of Christians of all Churches and Christian communities to be united in responding to the social, political, and religious realities of Asia today.

Two major challenges were mentioned. One challenge is that of forming Christian youth in a commitment to build Christian unity. A second challenge is that of making our parish communities

---

110. “Third Seminar Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU III): Final Statement,” 27 January-1 February, 2001, Chang Mai, Thailand, in FAPA III, 151-154.

111. The Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA) was renamed in August of 2008 to the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA).



and pastors to be focal points for deeper involvement in the search for full visible Christian unity. Joint projects such as the Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS) and the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS), and others are encouraged. Mutual cooperation and activities at national and local levels are also to be strongly encouraged.

- **2.8. Joint Ecumenical Formation (JEF)**

One of the very concrete resolutions of AMCU II of 1998 was to have regional-level ecumenical formation programs realized by an equal participation and contribution of each full and equal partner.

- **2.8.1. JEF I**

This was realized in September 14-30, 1999 when the first CCA-FABC Joint Ecumenical Formation program was held in Bangalore, India, for Christians of the South-Asian region. It was no doubt a very significant first step as it was truly a joint program, in what came to be called a 50-50 partnership: both the CCA and the FABC each contributed 50% towards the program. Thus, from the number of participants to the number of resource persons to the amount of financial contributions, etc., each party had exactly half of the share. The program was therefore co-owned by both CCA and FABC alike. It was very unlike FABC programs where CCA members were invited to participate or CCA programs with Catholic participation. The 35 Participants attending the program in southern India, half of them Catholics and the other half from various CCA member Churches, are mostly from India and other South Asian countries, with a few from Malaysia and Indonesia.

Participants were asked to learn from Pentecostal Churches instead of being jealous of their success. Most members of

Pentecostal Churches experience a sense of belonging to their ecclesial community, something which is often missing from mainline Churches and they practice participatory leadership, and hence members feel their gifts are appropriately used. During the two-week program, participants studied issues of ecumenism, dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, expressions of Asian theologies, issues in feminist theologies and environmental issues. Both the FABC Plenary Assembly held at Samphan in January 2000 as well as the CCA General Assembly held at Tomohon in June 2000 ratified this need for ecumenical formation.

•                   **2.8.2. JEF II**

The Second CCA-FABC Joint Ecumenical Formation program was organized for the region of North-East Asia.<sup>112</sup> JEP II gathered in Taiwan engaged 45 participants from 15 countries from September 2-13, 2002. Like the first, the second was organized by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The theme was: "Together in Cultivating a Culture of Peace." This was hosted by the National Council of Churches in Taiwan (NCCT) where the Roman Catholic Church is a full participating member.

Part of the program was conducted in Taipei. The rest was in Hualien, 120 kilometers southeast of the capital, in an area whose population has a high percentage of minority tribal people. Two days of exposure helped the participants understand discrimination that ethnic minorities experience, and other socio-political issues in Taiwan.

---

112. "Second CCA-FABC Joint Ecumenical Formation (JEF II): Together in Cultivating a Culture of Peace," 2-13 September, 2002, Taipei-Hualien, Taiwan, in FAPA IV, 189-196.

The participants committed themselves to promote established ecumenical activities like the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, to initiating new endeavors like joint ecumenical formation programs with the sharing of resources, fostering an ecumenical consciousness in all areas of Church life and to develop friendships both across churches and other religions to cultivate a culture of peace. They also requested that the CCA and FABC continue to organize joint ecumenical formation, provide resources, to promote both ecumenical relations and interreligious dialogue and to encourage local churches to establish more effective ecumenical structures at all levels to better promote ecumenical activities.

• **2.9. *Asian Ecumenical Committee***

In 1993, a Joint FABC-CCA Task Force approved plans for the formation of an Asian Ecumenical Committee (AEC). The committee is a concrete manifestation of the partnership between the two bodies to work together for Christian unity in the spirit of the motto: “Everything that we can do together let us not do separately.” Such a partnership for unity and cooperation is to be at three levels—joint projects, cooperation in each other’s projects or reciprocal invitations and joint staff meetings. The committee is also to foster ecumenical relations at national and local levels, and conscientize Christians of all churches to work for Christian unity. The agreement, as mentioned, was approved by the FABC and CCA assemblies in 1995.

In July, 1996, the membership of the AEC was approved, with seven Roman Catholic members and seven from the churches of the CCA. The first meeting of the AEC took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka on January 14-16, 1997. Among the joint projects approved were the preparation of a directory for migrant workers

and for churches that serve migrants, Catholic participation at the Congress of Asian Theologians and in the Asian Ecumenical Courses, a joint celebration of the Jubilee in the year 2000, a jointly organized Christian-Muslim consultation, and an ecumenical prayer in Hong Kong.

The joint staff of the FABC and the CCA met at the CCA headquarters in Hong Kong on 13-14 June 1997 in an informal meeting. They discussed ways of implementing the proposals made at the AEC meeting in Colombo.

The second meeting of the AEC was held in Tegaljaya, Indonesia on 7-9 January 1998 immediately preceding the second Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU II). The main points decided upon were contact with the Vatican's Office of the Synod to ensure CCA representation at the Asian Synod, a joint celebration of the Year 2000, to encourage the Episcopal conferences to consider forms of ecumenical association with other churches at the national and regional levels, and Catholic participation in the Asian Ecumenical Course. The CCA was represented at the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops by two CCA members of the AEC.

The AEC met again on December 3, 1999. Topics discussed included the next ACMU III gathering, the Regional Ecumenical Course of the CCA and future collaboration in this, and a possible Asian Forum of Christians Churches and Organizations as proposed by the WCC. The Asia Conference of Theological Students to be held in 2000 was discussed with the decision that the CCA will sponsor and plan the meeting. The next joint staff meeting of the CCA and the FABC was also part of the meeting.

The CCA and the FABC held a joint staff meeting at the CCA Centre in Hong Kong on August 1-2, 2001. The meeting had the following objectives: for the staff to get acquainted with each other, to familiarize staff with each other's organizational

structures and programs, to review the existing CCA–FABC cooperation and joint programs, and to explore further possible areas of cooperation and new ways of doing things together. There are two means of collaboration. First is when the CCA prepares programs and invites FABC to participate or send a representative and vice versa. Second is when both CCA and FABC plan the program together and share the cost equally. There should be a continuing joint sharing and meeting of staff of the CCA and the FABC, for exchange of concerns, program approaches and program focuses. There should also be an exchange of publications, books, reports etc. It was felt that the CCA and the FABC should continue the ongoing practice of mutual invitation to programs and meetings, but they should also work towards more fifty-fifty sharing through joint programs. (In fact, programs such as Asian Movement for Christian Unity and the Joint Ecumenical Formation were done on this basis.) It was emphasized that the collaboration does not just happen at the program but also before as well as after the program. This includes mutual consultation on the theme or focuses of the program, the preparation of the appropriate representative and the follow-up work that must be done. The importance of knowing more about each office or program area and the corresponding staff was emphasized. It was suggested that there be a group email for both the FABC and the CCA. The issue of religious fundamentalism was picked up as a priority issue at the meeting. The group decided to make use of a joint Social Advocacy Group. Their role will be to analyze trends and issues and then to suggest to the bodies concerned what to do together.

The Asian Ecumenical Committee met June 15-17, 2003 in Jakarta to plan new cooperative ecumenical ventures. Representatives of the two regional bodies decided to further their commitment to ecumenical formation with a seminar in

2004 for theology students and young theologians. They decided to organize the fourth Asian Movement for Christian Unity session with the aim of bringing together staff and officials of both organizations to explore ways in which the Catholic Church in Asia could become a full member of national and regional councils of Churches. They have scheduled a training session on peace and conflict transformation with the Asian Muslim Action Network.<sup>113</sup>

There was an Asian consultation in Hong Kong in May of 2004 in preparation for the international Global Christian Forum to be held in Nairobi, Kenya in November of 2007. This was part of a series of continental meetings to prepare for this event. There were over sixty participants. This was jointly sponsored by the CCA, FABC and the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA).<sup>114</sup> The assembly committed themselves to explore together models for working, studying and addressing issues that are of common concern and affirmed the need to work together and continue this initiative at the regional, national and local level.

The Asian Ecumenical Committee (AEC), hosted by the CCA, met at the Bangkok Christian Guest House September, 20, 2006 and were joined by Evangelicals and Pentecostals. The CCA and the FABC co-organized the Global Christian Forum (GCF) in Asia on September 21–23, 2006 with the theme: “Affirming Our One Savior in Common Witness.” This was a follow-up to the Hong Kong 2004 Asian consultation that suggested that the CCA, FABC and the Evangelicals and Pentecostals in Asia hold an Asian gathering. At his meeting the EFA and Pentecostal Churches were invited to some of the ongoing joint FABC-CCA programs such

---

113. See 2.6 Christian-Muslim Dialogue: AMAN – CCA – FABC.

114. As previously mentioned, the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA) was renamed in August of 2008 to the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA).

as the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU) and the Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS). The forthcoming meetings of the AMCU and ACTS will be the projects of FABCCCA with a partnership with the EFA.

- **2.10. *Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS)***

- **2.10.1. ACTS I**

To retrieve the broken tradition of involving theological students in the life and work of the ecumenical movement, the then CCA Program Committee on Theological Concerns organized what has been officially called the First Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS I) on 14-19 August 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The theme was “The Ecumenical Movement in Transition: Issues, Concerns and Challenges for a New Generation.” To this conference the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences was invited to send some Catholic theological students.

Seventy students, theological faculty members and administrators, and ecumenical leaders participated in the Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS I). The participants came from nineteen countries. They represented the major theological schools of the Protestant and Orthodox constituencies of the CCA. Twelve Catholic students from Catholic theological schools in Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Japan, Korea and the Philippines also attended the conference as full participants. It was hoped that the participants would provide initiative towards the formation of networks of pastoral and theological work in the region and that it would also provide occasion to engage theological students towards the discussion and understanding of issues, concerns and perspectives of the ecumenical movement

and to consider commitment to ecumenical life and thought in the region and worldwide as a vital part of being Church in Asia.

• **2.10.2. ACTS II**

ACTS II was jointly organized by the CCA and the OEIA-FABC and held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on July 25-31, 2004.<sup>115</sup> There were 75 participants with more or less equal representation from the CCA and the FABC. Participants from Asia came from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Among the group of Protestant and Catholic seminarians was a Muslim Indonesian woman who is presently doing her Ph. D. studies in systematic theology. Her presence at this Christian conference was greatly appreciated by the participants.

It was recommended that the churches in Asia to encourage holding more such ecumenical conferences by providing more financial and moral support. Church leaders were also called upon to encourage and initiate the inculturation of teachings and liturgies in order to develop a truly Asian theology. In line with the wider understanding of ecumenism, leaders of mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches were urged to actively build ties with Evangelical, independent and charismatic groups, even as interreligious dialogue and cooperation should be continuously pursued.

The group also had recommendations for their sending theological institutions: (a) that the curriculum include studies on inter-religious relations, inculturation and feminist theology; (b) that they teach and encourage the use of scriptures from other

---

115. "Second Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS II): Issue, Trends and Challenges in Theology in Asia," July 25-31, 2004, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in FAPA IV, 205-213.



faiths and of indigenous elements in liturgies; and (c) that they send more participants to ecumenical conferences by increasing financial and moral support.

They also had recommendations for themselves: (a) to strive to learn and know more about other religions and cultures than their own; (b) to exercise respect for Christians of other denominations and persons of other faiths; and (c) to write reflections on ecumenism and inter-faith efforts to give greater support and publicity to such activities.

• **2.10.3. ACTS III**

The CCA and the FABC co-organized the Third Asia Conference of Theology Students (ACTS III) that was held in Davao City, Philippines on 8-12 October 2007. The 51 participants were students of theology from the Catholic Church, the member churches of the Christian Conference of Asia and the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA).<sup>116</sup> The theme was “Doing Theology Ecumenically in Asia: Reflecting in the Global Context and Preparing Future Leaders.” The participants recommended that they commit themselves to work for unity amidst diversity, to spread the spirit of oneness to others and to support local and international organizations like the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) and other organizations in their initiative for peace and unity. They urged for more participation of the Christian churches and the use of other faith expressions in the pursuit of peace and unity because the world in general and Asia in particular are in need of peace since there is no gain in war and violence.

---

116. As previously mentioned, the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA) was renamed in August of 2008 to the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA).

- **2.11. Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS)**

- **2.11.1. CATS I**

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has in recent times undertaken the prominent role in developing and promoting the Asian theological agenda in the Asian ecumenical movement. Various individual theologians from different Asian countries have met, first in Hong Kong in May and then in Seoul, Korea in July 1996, and decided to issue a call and to organize a Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS). The first Congress was held in Suwon, Korea from May 25 - June 1, 1997, and it adopted their Constitution. The theme was: "Asian Theology in a Changing Asia: Asian Theological Agenda Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." The FABC was represented officially by five delegates. The founding organizations are the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the South Asia Theological Research Institute of the Board of Theological Education of Senate of Serampore College (SATHRI BTE-SSC), the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), and the Program for Theologies and Cultures in Asia (PTCA).

- **2.11.2. CATS II**

CATS II was held in Bangalore, India in August, 1999. It was a large gathering of about 104 Asian theologians from 15 countries. The FABC sent an official delegation of ten participants. The theme was "Celebrating Life in Asia." There were three sub-themes: globalization and the homogenisation of cultures, spirituality in the midst of the religious and cultural plurality of Asia, and new life in community, communion and solidarity. The congress affirmed the need for a new paradigm of mission, emphasizing dialogue and mutual conversion in the context of

religious and cultural pluralism, and resistance against the forces of oppression, exploitation and violence. This gave emphasis to the fact that the Church's mission is one of love and service to all, especially in our age of globalization where fullness of life is more and more denied to the vast majority of the people of Asia.

- **2.11.3. CATS III**

The Third Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS III) assembled about 120 participants from among most of the Asian Countries and from other parts of the world from August 5-11, 2001 in order to discuss the ways and means of “Visioning New Life Together Among Asian Religions.” At this critical juncture of Asian history, all peoples of Asia who belong to different traditions, religious and secular, have to join hands and walk together to envision a new life for all the people of Asia and for the whole world. CATS III called for a common search and exploration to discover the liberative potential of the various religious traditions of Asia and to gather these vital spiritual resources for creating new Asian societies and envisioning new life for all the people of Asia.

- **2.11.4. CATS IV**

The Fourth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS IV) was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in August 3-10, 2003, and focused on the theme, “Building Communities: Asians in Search of New Pedagogies of Encounter.” There were 100 participants from 15 Asian countries and 11 other countries, 64 men and 36 women. This Fourth Congress is unique in including intentionally a one-day women's forum as part of the program, so that women's perspectives are included in the discussion of the overall theme of the congress.

- **2.11.5. CATS V**

CATS V was held from August 21-25, 2006 in Hong Kong with the gathering of 74 theologians. The theme was: “Sharing Hope for a New World.” As in the tradition of CATS, a one-day Women’s Forum was held on 21 August to provide women participants time for sharing their pain and gain in a usually male-dominated field of theology and theological education. An interfaith panel consisting of scholars from Chinese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism and Islam provided an opportunity to hear from other theologians on the hope of their respective faith communities.

- **2.11.6. CATS VI**

CATS VI was held in Iloilo, Philippines from February 8-14, 2009. The theme was “Doing Mission from the Underside: A Challenge to the Understanding of Mission Since 1910.” There were seventy nine delegates who came from fifteen countries in Asia. Catholics were eight of the seventy nine delegates, with six of those FABC representatives.<sup>117</sup> The Congress expressed the need for a way of doing mission that is in humble solidarity with the poor and oppressed, with understanding to the many different groups that are on the underside. There was a great diversity expressed during the Congress yet this was seen as a source of enrichment to see new perspectives and challenges.

- **2.12. Consultation: Challenges to Christian Unity**

From August 1-6, 2005 the OEIA organized a consultation for the Ecumenical and Interreligious Commissions of the Episcopal Conferences of the FABC around the theme “Challenges to Christian Unity” that focused on those ecclesial communities

---

117. This included the Executive Secretary of the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) of the FABC. The OTC will be the FABC point of contact with the future CATS and not the OEIA.

that do not take part in the ecumenical movement.<sup>118</sup> There were 45 participants from 14 countries.

There were presentations on the Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. The assembly discussed what kind of dialogue would be possible and what would be points of contact. Both the Catholics and historic churches can learn from the Evangelicals and Pentecostals and they too can learn from us. The participants proposed that there is a need to animate the liturgy so that is an occasion of joyous worship of the Lord. There should be the development of charisms so that a more participatory church is promoted. There is a need for formation programs to learn to read and study the Bible more deeply. Parish life must emphasize the person and make people feel welcome. The bishops' ecumenical commissions should take the initiative to make contact with the Evangelicals and Pentecostals and at all levels we must foster friendships.

- **2.13. Seminar on Christian Unity**

A seminar on “The Search for Christian Unity: Where We Stand Today” was held in Seoul, Korea from July 17-21, 2006. A similar seminar was also held February 7-11, 2007 in Manila, Philippines. The event was organized by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity together with the Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue of the FABC, in order to provide an opportunity for Asian bishops and others working in the field to reflect on the realities of ecumenical relations in Asian countries, and to develop effective pastoral approaches. This was part of a series of seminars the Pontifical Council was organizing on various themes associated with ecumenism.

---

118. “Consultation of Ecumenical and Interreligious Commissions of Episcopal Conferences in Asia,” August 1-6, 2005, Pattaya, Thailand, in FAPA IV, 215-219.

- **2.14. Seminar on the Church's Call to Dialogue: Special Role of the Bishops**

A refresher seminar on “The Church’s Call to Dialogue: Special Role of the Bishops” was held in Bangkok at the FABC Documentation Center from July 21-25, 2009. Of the 29 participants, 15 were bishops from Korea, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand. The seminar explored the history of the FABC and the history of dialogue in the FABC. The relationship between culture and dialogue was opened up towards an understanding of communicating in new ways for better understanding the other. The meaning of dialogue and the work of the Holy Spirit was addressed based on *Redemptoris Missio*. Country reports were presented by regional groupings to the plenary in addition to the regional discussions on culture and dialogue.

- **2.15. Interreligious and Ecumenical Directory**

In 2009, the OEIA compiled a directory for all of the FABC member Bishops’ Conferences and associate members of the offices or contact persons in each place for both ecumenical and interreligious affairs. The directory also includes the contact person for both the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The reason for this directory is to facilitate communication, particularly via email, among the Bishops’ Conferences together with the OEIA in order to share information about ecumenism and interreligious dialogue among the FABC members.

### • 3. Prospects for the Future

The commitment to sincere and continuing dialogue that is the focal point of the beginnings of the FABC at the 1970 Asian Bishops Meeting and the overarching framework expressed in the first FABC assembly in 1974 as a dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor has inspired the work of the OEIA in the past 30 years since the first BIRA in 1979.

The 9th FABC Assembly of 2009 spoke of a framework of a movement toward a renewed Church-in-mission or toward the building of the Local Church. Several principles were presented as fundamental for movements of Church renewal in Asia. These come from the FABC vision of a renewed church-in-mission, requiring the primary pastoral focus of building the Local Church-in-mission; the renewal of clergy, religious and laity in view of that vision and task; and the principles of communion, co-responsibility and participation. It is in light of these elements of Church renewal that we can understand the general mandate of the FABC to assist the Episcopal conferences.

The very beginnings of the work of the OEIA was to consult the Bishops' Conferences about what they were doing regarding ecumenism and interreligious dialogue and to ask them what they wanted and needed to assist them regarding ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in the ever on-going task of Church renewal. This aspect of consulting and asking is focused on each local bishop and each local Church. The ever present question is how can the OEIA be of assistance to the episcopal conferences in their striving towards a renewed Church-in-mission? This is this ever-present question that will point us to the future. It is the role of the OEIA to be of assistance to the bishops and the Bishops' Conferences.

The different Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs,

Seminar for Interreligious Affairs, Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs and other conferences, seminars and consultations were attempts to respond to the expressed needs of the Bishops' Conferences regarding interreligious dialogue. These were at different levels, some were at the level of bishops, one was for rectors of seminaries, others were for Church leaders such as teachers, pastoral workers, youth leaders, catechists, and parish priests and other brought together bishops and a variety of Church leaders. Others brought together peoples of other faith traditions.

In addition, we see that in the context of interreligious dialogue, the OEIA moved forward in the area of ecumenism beginning with mention of ecumenism in BIRA II in 1979. BIRA IV/1 in 1984 included the attendance of a fraternal delegate from the Christian Conference of Asia. Then BIRA IV/6 in 1987 was called the Joint FABC-CCA Consultation. This beginning has borne fruit in the growth of ecumenical sharing in the Hua Hin Agreement in 1993. This was followed by involvement in the Asian Movement for Christian Unity, the Asian Ecumenical Committee, the Asia Conference of Theological Students, the Joint Ecumenical Formation, the Congress of Asian Theologians, and the joint meetings of the Christian Conference of Asia and the FABC.

The past 30 years present an inspiration, but we are also aware that every year there are new bishops in the conferences. The seven-year plan of ten Bishops' Institutes beginning in 1984 was that each bishop in Asia would have the opportunity to attend at least one of the Bishops' Institutes. This vision needs to be renewed over and over again. Renewal is a continuum of movements that has no end. Church renewal is today and always. Church renewal is a process of continuous beginnings.

The variety of activities in the past 30 years ask of the Bishops' Conferences of Asia to reflect and seek ways to ever



increase the local Churches commitment to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. This will help to develop the vision of being a truly local Church, a renewed Church-in-mission, in Asia. Dialogue is the new way of being Church; it is an integral element of the Church and mission. A renewed Church-in-mission is a renewed Church-in-dialogue. Emphasis needs to be made on dialogue that is both interreligious and ecumenical as we continue on our pilgrimage of faith.



### **FABC Papers:**

121. Asian Consultation on Harmony Through Reconciliation-FEISA VII, by the FABC Office of Human Development, 2007
122. Seminar for Bishops of Asia: Caring for Priests - Especially for Those with Difficulties, by the FABC Office of Clergy, 2007
123. Asian Vocations Symposium: Asian Vocations Today, by the FABC Office of Consecrated Life & FABC Office of Clergy, 2007
124. Eucharist as Communication, by the FABC Office of Social Communication, 2008
125. FABC Papers Periodic Index (Papers 101-125), James H. Kroeger M.M., 2008
126. Being Schools, Becoming Eucharist, by the FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation, 2008
127. A Few Theological and Pastoral Perspectives of Inter-faith Marriages, by the FABC Office of Theological Concerns, 2009
128. Seventh Bishops' Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM VII): Social Communication in Catholic Universities of Asia – Facts, Experiences, Challenges, by the FABC Office of Social Communication, 2009
129. Living the Eucharist in Asia: IX FABC Plenary Assembly, 2010
130. Dialogue: Interpretive Key for the Life of the Church in Asia, James H. Kroeger M.M., 2010

**Published August 2010**

**FABC Papers is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed, are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: [fabc@hkдавс.com](mailto:fabc@hkдавс.com) .**