

**The Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Context of Christianity in Asia:
From the Perspective of Frederick E. Crowe
and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)**

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Doctor of Theology Program
Theology Department
Regis College, Toronto School of Theology
University of Toronto

Heejung Adele Cho
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Introduction

Christianity, as it had developed in the West, was introduced into Asian countries whose cultures had been greatly influenced by other religious traditions such as Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism. In an Asian context, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue has been unavoidable as Asians have embraced Christianity through the process of the Christian inculturation. Due to the multi-cultural and multi-religious environment in Asia, Asian Christians have been invited to search out various ways to integrate their own cultural heritage with the teachings of Christianity. While enrichment through diversity has greatly benefitted many, there have also been challenges for Asian Christians. Sometimes a clash between the teachings of Christianity and the cultural heritage within the Asian context became unavoidable. Asian Christians are invited to remain faithful to their own religious commitment while respecting the cultural heritage in Asia and to live in peace and harmony with people of various beliefs.

In search of a common foundation for interreligious dialogue during the Christian inculturation in an Asian context, special attention has been paid to the role of the Holy Spirit. The Asian bishops are strongly convinced that the experience of the human quest for transcendence resonates with the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit. While not imposing the work of the Holy Spirit to the concepts of other religions, the Asian bishops reviewed concepts in the religio-cultural traditions in Asia that evoke resonances with the understanding of the Holy Spirit in Christianity. The Pneumatology from an Asian perspective emphasizes the notion of harmony that acknowledges “the human search for an underlying unity that enables us to understand plurality better.”¹ From this particular point of view, the Asian

¹ The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology; Doing Theology in Asia Today,” *FABC Papers*, no. 96 (Oct. 2000), 9. Available online: http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_96.pdf. Accessed Aug. 13, 2014.

bishops affirm a stance of receptive pluralism which recognizes the possibility of various ways of expressing the promptings of the Holy Spirit. According to them, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are experienced within the pluralistic contexts of different religions, cultures and worldviews. This means that it is possible to have diverse expressions for reception of divine revelation according to the context in which the revelation is being received and communicated.

The problem of religious pluralism and the challenge to live in harmony extends beyond the continent of Asia, as a multi-cultural society can be found almost anywhere in the world today. In the broader view of the world as a global village, the Roman Catholic Church is faced with the need to develop a new theological view which can facilitate understanding of diverse theologies within their own context. With regard to this, Frederick E. Crowe argues that developing an inclusive Pneumatology to speak about the universal presence of the Holy Spirit can help Christians to understand and appreciate the good and holy elements in diverse contexts.² Placing an emphasis on the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit, Crowe raises further questions for Christians today with regard to the possibility of God's plan for the role of the various religions. He asks, "How should we conceive of the overarching order of a universe when we give equal attention to the presence of Son and to the presence of the Spirit?"³ More precisely perhaps the question is, "How will our understanding of non-Christians as gifted with the Spirit affect our general attitude and relation to them?"⁴

This essay is an attempt to provide one answer to Crowe's questions from an Asian Christian perspective. The Pneumatology from an Asian Christian perspective can be shown as a

² Frederick E. Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit and World Religions," in *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 324-343.

³ Frederick E. Crowe, *Christ and History: The Christology of Bernard Lonergan from 1935 to 1982*. (Ottawa: Novalis, 2005), 220.

⁴ Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit, and World Religions," 333.

concrete example of placing an equal emphasis on the presence of the Son and the presence of the Spirit in diverse contexts of Christian theology. Asian Christians view non-Christians as gifted with the Spirit, thereby affecting the general attitude and relationship to non-Christians to be more inclusive and integral to a theology in a global context of religious pluralism. In this essay, I will argue that an understanding of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit provides a substantial theology for understanding the commonality among the theologies in diverse contexts including Asia. In discussing the role of religions in view of the universal mission of the Holy Spirit, I will follow Bernard Lonergan's understanding of the hermeneutical scissors movement with "an upper blade in the categories and a lower blade in the data."⁵ The exposition of Crowe's concerns will function as an upper blade in providing a substantial theology in a transcultural base; the exploration of Asian bishops' effort for Christian inculturation in Asia will function as a lower blade in providing concrete examples of communicated data in an Asian context. I will consult the works of Frederick E. Crowe and the papers of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC). I will focus particularly on *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, a document from the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference.

In what follows, I will first elaborate on the specific character of Asian theology with regard to religious pluralism. Secondly, I will discuss the philosophy of interiority in Roman Catholic theology suggested by Crowe. I will also attempt to show the way Crowe presents a balanced understanding between the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, I will examine the Pneumatology from an Asian perspective as given in *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, with an emphasis on the Asian bishops' attempts to find the resonances of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, primal religions,

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 293.

and Islam. Finally, I will discuss religious pluralism as receptive pluralism as a lived reality in Asia, and examine the ways in which harmony among receptive pluralism can become possible through an Asian approach to Pneumatology.

1. The Specific Character of Asian Theology with Regard to Religious Pluralism

Asia is the largest continent in which almost two-thirds of humanity reside. The phenomenon of religious pluralism is a lived reality for all people in Asia and is more than a theological issue to be considered by theologians through reflections and debates. Pope John Paul II, in his *Ecclesia in Asia* recognized the issue of religious pluralism in Asia when he wrote, “the most striking feature of the continent is the variety of its peoples who are heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions.”⁶ The Asian bishops argue that, because of the diversity given in an Asian context, the expressions of living faith in Jesus Christ can be varied. They insist that the variety of expressions of faith is “the result of a genuine incarnation of the mystery of Christ in the flesh and blood of Asian peoples.”⁷ In their attempt to deal with the existential reality of religious pluralism in Asia, Asian bishops argue that the issue of religious pluralism in Asia constitutes a specific character of the approach to dialogue for Christians in Asia. This is because the issue of religious pluralism for Asian theologians is more than simply a particular theological problem among other theological problems.

Following the Second Vatican Council, the Asian bishops faced many practical and theological questions that were unique within the Asian context. In this new era of collegiality, with Rome being no longer the one and only exclusive center of the Roman Catholic Church, the

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia: Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Vatican (1999), no. 6. Available online: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jpii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html. Accessed Aug. 13, 2014.

⁷ OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” 2.

Asian bishops recognized the need for local episcopal conferences in a hope to carry forward the spirit of renewal within the Church. Thus, immediately following the Vatican Council, the Asian bishops began to prepare for the official gathering in Manila, Philippines in 1970. The Asian bishops' resolution to establish a permanent structure for a meeting of Asian bishops was realized by a visit of the Pope in Asia. The papal visit of Pope Paul VI in 1970 laid a firm foundation for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) which was an "historical moment full of mystery" according to the Pope.⁸ At the First General Assembly of the FABC in Taipei in 1974, the central task for Asian minority churches was discussed. They were identified as a triple dialogue, with Asian cultures, with the poor, and with the religions of Asia. The assembly emphasized the importance of dialogue with the great religious traditions of Asian peoples.

In this dialogue we accept the Asian religions as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations.⁹

The association of the Asian bishops continued to the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia (The Asian Synod) which met in Rome from April 19 through May 14, 1998. In this Synod, the importance of interreligious dialogue in Asia was discussed with a further suggestion to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in Asia. It states: "... other religions in Asia

⁸ Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, ed. "A Brief History of the FABC," *FABC Papers*, no. 139 (2013), 5. Available online: <http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/FABC%20Papers%20139.pdf>. Accessed Aug. 13, 2014.

⁹ "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia": Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly, a. IV. 14. in *For All Peoples of Asia Vol. 1: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*. eds. Gaudencio B. Rosales DD and C.G. Arevalo SJ. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 14. [Henceforth, FAPA I].

constitute for the Church a positive challenge. They stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and the working of the Holy Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she has received for the good of all.”¹⁰

For Asian theologians, dialogue with other religions can provide a “heuristic principle to develop a genuinely Asian theology.”¹¹ The final statement of the First Plenary Assembly of FABC states: “In dialogue with these religions, we will find ways of expressing our own Christian faith... The great religious traditions can shed light on the truths of the Gospel. They can help us understand the riches of our faith.”¹² The attitude of openness to dialogue is reflected in the theological viewpoint of FABC which distinguishes itself from the theological discussions of European theology. From this particular perspective, Asian theologians are strongly convinced that the Asian Churches are called to make a contribution towards the theology of religions in the world of religious pluralism. For Asian theologians, the central issue for the theology of the local church is the place of Christianity within the Asian world of religious pluralism. More particularly speaking, the issue of interreligious dialogue during the Christian inculturation is crucial for developing a truly local theology given the diversity of the Asian context. Thus, Asian theologians may bring a significant change in perspective and approach to world religions in an Asian context. The approach of Asian theologians towards Christianity within the world of

¹⁰ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia, “*Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: “...That They May Have Life, and Have It Abundantly” (JN 10:10)*. Vatican City (1998), a. 32. Available online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20021998_asia-instrlabor_en.html. Accessed Aug. 13, 2014.

¹¹ Georg Evers, “The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians towards a Theology of Religions” in *Reaping a Harvest from the Asian Soil: Towards an Asian Theology*, ed. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 2011), 68.

¹² “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia”: Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly, a. II. 13-14, in FAPA I, 23.

religious pluralism is well expressed by the Theological Advisory Commission of the FABC, which now is the Office for Theological Concerns of the FABC.

In the course of the last thousand years the Church has encountered and dialogues with various peoples, cultures and religions, with varying levels of success. Today, however, especially in Asia, in the context of the Great Religions, which are in a process of revival and renewal, the Church is aware of a markedly different situation. We do not ask any longer about the relationship of the Church to other cultures and religions. We are rather searching for the place and role of the Church in a religiously and culturally pluralistic world.¹³

The appreciation of the heritage of Asian religions is rooted in the strong belief which is influenced by concrete and existential interchange with followers of world religions in Asia. Following the teachings of Vatican II, Asian bishops are convinced that the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is at work outside the visible Christian community through various traditions in Asia (GS, 11; AG, 15).

2. Exposition of Frederick E. Crowe's Concerns

Having discussed the special attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in an Asian context, I would like to turn to Crowe's concerns with regard to the importance of the mission of the Holy Spirit. Crowe recognizes the lack of attention to the Holy Spirit in the Roman Catholic Church and insists that the major challenge and opportunity in a Trinitarian framework is the retrieval of the mission of the Holy Spirit in systematic theology. He argues that the Roman Catholic Church has held a practical binitarianism which does not deny the three persons of the Trinity on a doctrinal level but practices as if there are only two persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Son.¹⁴ He contends that the practical binatarianism stems from the lack of categories in the present Church to relate the Trinitarian missions to the personal experience of the presence of the

¹³ Theological Advisory Commission of the FABC, "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue," *FABC Papers*, no. 48 (1987), 3. Available online: http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_48.pdf. Accessed Aug. 13, 2014.

¹⁴ Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit, and World Religions, 331.

Spirit within us. According to Crowe, the philosophy of interiority through turning to subject is required for a theology of the roles of Son and Spirit in this world.

2.1. Philosophy of Interiority in Roman Catholic Theology

Crowe argues that the Roman Catholic Church has lacked categories in which to speak of this presence and fruit of the Spirit, and it is necessary to develop a theology that elaborates on the experiential aspect of the presence of the Spirit which can also provide rules for discerning the guidance of the Spirit.¹⁵ Crowe makes distinction between the outer experience through the presence of the Son and the inner experience through the presence of the Spirit. The outer experience is the experience of senses such as experience of shape, color, weight, sound, and so on. The disciples of Jesus had outer experience of Jesus through their seeing, hearing, and touching Jesus Christ, the Son. Their outer experience of Jesus had been shared by Christian communities, and later was passed on through generations forming a Christian tradition that preserves witnesses of the Word of God. Crowe argues that the outer experience of the Son requires the interior help of the Holy Spirit through the inner experience. He says,

Such [outer] experience [of the Son] then is not by itself salvific. It needs the interior complement of the movement of the Holy Spirit: ‘No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father’, and the Father draws through the Holy Spirit: ‘no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.’¹⁶

The inner experience of the presence of the Spirit within us is an interior experience such as love and joy. Paul defines the fruit of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22).” The difficulty to conceive of data in the realms of interiority arises when it comes to grasping the invisible data of consciousness. Crowe says that although the philosophy of interiority is fundamental, it has been difficult to conceive

¹⁵ Frederick E. Crowe, “Rethinking God-with-us” in *Lonergan and the Level of Our Time*. ed. Michael Vertin. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 342.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 341-342.

of data in the realms of interiority, and some philosophers resisted putting the data of consciousness on an equal footing with the data of sense. However, Crowe continues to say that “to be invisible does not mean to be present without manifestation in experience”.¹⁷ Therefore, the Church needs to develop a philosophy of interiority which can compensate for the lack of a conceptual system through which Christians can acknowledge their inner experience through the mission of the Holy Spirit. Crowe is inviting Christians to shift from a conceptual approach to an approach that is guided by interiority. Based on Crowe’s arguments, our awareness of the realm of interiority will help us to attain a balance between our understanding of the mission of the Son and the mission of the Spirit.

Following Lonergan, Crowe turns to the notion of interiority in order to identify a structured pattern of differentiated consciousness. He says interiority can be recognized when we acknowledge our heightened awareness when we objectify ourselves as knowers in the acts of understanding.¹⁸ According to him, our awareness of ourselves as a subject is not based on an introspective intuition. Instead, interiority is recognized in a structured pattern that is found in an analysis of consciousness, and by this analysis we can find a way to understand how our own consciousness works. Moreover, analyzing consciousness helps us to understand that we engage in distinctive operations of consciousness in our acts of coming to know. Crowe draws on Lonergan who describes interiority in terms of “intentional and conscious acts on the four levels of experience, understanding, judging and deciding”.¹⁹ These operations of consciousness are distinct; however, they function as a structured and dynamic pattern forming a dynamic unity of

¹⁷ Ibid., 343.

¹⁸ Crowe, *Christ and History*, 71.

¹⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 120.

a differentiated consciousness. The distinct levels of consciousness are integrated within the self-transcending dynamism of the subject.

Interiorly differentiated consciousness directs our attention to our heightened self-awareness as a subject who has the potential and intrinsic freedom and its conditions. For instance, as potency implies direction and is not arbitrary, our life will unfold reflecting the relations that are the conditions for our freely sustaining and promoting further life. This understanding of a subject's intrinsic freedom and its conditions reflect a world order that Lonergan identifies as emergent probability.²⁰ Emergent probability is Lonergan's terms for the operation of a world process that sets the norms and conditions for the possibility of human progress. As human beings are situated in the context of this world, the human progress can be understood as part of a world process. In the notion of emergent probability, new things emerge and this emergence is not necessary but only probable. From this point of view, the known is neither an object of observation, nor constituted and already out there now, because the emergence of new things is only contingent and probable. One's inner cognitional process of coming to know itself constitutes knowledge. Thus, the foundation for coming to know is based on a turn to one's affirmation of oneself as an authentic subject, the knower. Based on this, Crowe invites Christians to shift their focus from a conceptual effort to understand the data of sense through the mission of the Son. He suggests a focus on the basis for the emergence of the concepts to understand the data of consciousness through the mission of the Holy Spirit. From this point of view, the inner experience through the Spirit is equally as important as the outer experience through the Son, and the act of understanding itself also has its own set of data, the data of consciousness.

²⁰ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: a Study of Human Understanding*, Vo. 3 of Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan. ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 144-148.

2.2. *A Balance between the Two Missions*

Crowe argues that acknowledging the interior help of the Holy Spirit will help to balance our understanding of the Trinitarian missions by retrieving the significance of the data of consciousness that is experienced through the mission of the Holy Spirit. Crowe argues, although the common understanding of the order of the Trinity as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not the only way to understand the Trinity, it has been considered as if it were the only option in Christian history. Crowe contends that this is because of the lack of categories in the present Church to relate the Trinitarian missions to the personal experience of the presence of the Spirit within us. This means that the data of consciousness that is the interior and personal experience through the mission of the Holy Spirit has not been on an equal footing with the data of sense that is the outer and historical experience through the mission of the Son.²¹

In examining the psychological analogies based on divine processions, Crowe argues that “the New Testament provides a wealth of material on Father, on Son, and on Holy Spirit, but not in a way that gives us a unified idea of their being”.²² According to him, when we order the Trinity in the order of divine processions, with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it can imply that the paternity of the Father and the filiation of the Son begin their relation as already distinguished and constituted as persons of the Father and the Son. In this way, the Spirit cannot easily be thought to be included in the common formulation of the Trinity as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In reverse to this, Crowe suggests a formulation that views that the Spirit is the “nexus” of the Father and the Son, meaning that the Spirit’s love unites them before they are distinguished.²³ Crowe argues that this formulation provides a more coherent understanding of

²¹ Crowe, “Rethinking God-with-us”, 343.

²² *Ibid.*, 337.

²³ Frederick E. Crowe, “Rethinking the Trinity: Taking Seriously the *Homoousios*” in *Loneragan and the Level of Our Time*. ed. Michael Vertin. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 406.

the Trinity because “in this conception, the infinite love that is the Spirit finds its ‘object’ and ‘partner’ first in the Word and Mystery as one, as united in the nexus of the Spirit’s love, and then as distinguished from one another.”²⁴ Thus, in this formulation, the Spirit is related to the Son and the Father in terms of the intersubjective communion of love.

Crowe suggests that this recognition of the Holy Spirit as a “nexus” will bring a balance among the missions of the Trinity. He pushes his point further by suggesting a reversal of the two Trinitarian missions that place an emphasis on the Holy Spirit who has been neglected among the Trinity.²⁵

Commonly we think of God first sending the Son, and of the Spirit being sent in that context, to bring to completion the work of the Son. This thesis says that on the contrary, God first sent the Spirit, and then sent the Son in the context of the Spirit’s mission, to bring to completion -- perhaps not precisely the work of the Spirit, but the work which God conceived as one work to be executed in the two steps of the twofold mission of first the Spirit and then the Son.²⁶

According to Crowe, God first sent the Spirit, and then sent Christ to bring to completion the mission of the Spirit in union with the sender of the gift of love, God the Father. This order presents an opposite perspective from an order of the Trinity based on divine processions which views paternity as a starting point, followed by filiation and spiration. Crowe, however, contends for the need to acknowledge the two ways of understanding the Trinity saying “what is first in our eyes is not first in itself; on the contrary, what is first in our eyes is last in itself, and what is last in our eyes is first in itself.”²⁷ Crowe defines the mission of the Holy Spirit as *donum*, the first and foundational gift from God, and this first gift is the gift of personal Love, the *amor donabilis* who is the Holy Spirit as the love sent to us.

²⁴ Ibid., 407.

²⁵ Frederick E. Crowe, “Son and Spirit: Tensions in the Divine Missions?” in *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*. ed. Michael Vertin. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 304.

²⁶ Crowe, “Son of God, Holy Spirit and World Religions,” 325.

²⁷ Ibid., 327.

Crowe provides the key to going beyond a binitarian theology by suggesting a well-balanced Trinitarian theology which recognizes the universal mission of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the focus on the Holy Spirit contributes to more openness towards world religions on the attitude of Christians by acknowledging the universal presence of the Holy Spirit both inside and outside of the Church communities. It is from this point of view that Crowe raises a question “How will our understanding of non-Christians as gifted with the Spirit affect our general attitude and relation to them?”²⁸ In what follows, I will present one answer to Crowe’s question from an Asian perspective consulting the papers by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).

3. Pneumatology from an Asian Perspective Expressed by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC)

The universal mission of the Holy Spirit suggested by Crowe parallels the writings of the Asian bishops who were active in finding concrete examples of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Asia. The Asian bishops’ efforts to establish Pneumatology from an Asian perspective is expounded in the document entitled, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today* which is issued by the FABC’s Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) in 1997.²⁹ *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today* came into being after a two-year study by a group of Asian theologians. In this document, Asian bishops examine the work of the Holy Spirit especially in connection with interreligious dialogue which takes place in the process of the Christian inculturation in Asia.³⁰ According to this

²⁸ Ibid., 333.

²⁹ The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” *FABC Papers* no. 81 (1997). Available online: <http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc%20paper%2081.pdf>. Accessed Aug. 13, 2014. Text also available in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. Documents from 1997-2001. Vol. III*, ed. Eilers, Frans-Josef (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2002), 237-327.

³⁰ The document consists of six sections: (1) The Spirit at work in various religio-cultural traditions of Asia, (2) The Spirit at work in socio-political realities, (3) The Spirit at work in the biblical traditions, (4) The Spirit at work in the church, (5) Towards an Asian theology of the Spirit, and (6) Pastoral recommendations.

comprehensive document, contextual realities embody and manifest the presence and action of the Holy Spirit which can be acknowledged through discernment and interpretation. In its structure, the document begins with the concrete examples of the presence and activity of the Spirit in religio-cultural traditions in Asia, rather than presenting the biblical and magisterial teachings on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the first place.³¹ The structure of the document implies that a theological reflection is carried out looking at the resources of cultures, religions and socio-political realities. This means that the contextual realities are considered *loci theologici* and resources of theology together with the Christian sources of Scripture and Tradition. The *loci* in which the Spirit is at work include contexts such as cultural pluralism in globalization, Asian religions and primal belief systems, and socio-political movements in conflicting ideologies. The extensive coverage of this document is supplemented by Christian Pneumatology derived from various Scriptures and from the documents of Vatican II and FABC. In what follows, I will present how Asian bishops attempt to find the resonances of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Asian religio-cultural traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, primal religions, and Islam.

3.1. The Resonances of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit in Asian Religio-cultural Traditions

The presence of the Holy Spirit outside the official structure of the Church is acknowledged in the documents of Vatican II. St. Paul writes, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raise Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you (Rom 8:23).” *Gaudium et Spes* adds to this and states,

All this [paschal mystery] holds true not only for Christians, but for all men [and women] of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For since

³¹ *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today* dedicates almost half of the total document in Part I and II, which are (1) The Spirit at work in various religio-cultural traditions of Asia, (2) The Spirit at work in socio-political realities.

Christ died for all men [and women], and since the ultimate vocation of man [and woman] is in face one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man [and woman] the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery (GS 22).

Following this position of Vatican II, the Asian bishops examine the unseen work of the Holy Spirit in an Asian context by discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit “as experienced, believed, imaged and symbolized by believers themselves of these [Asian] traditions.”³² While not imposing the Holy Spirit to various realities present in Asian religions, the document reviews what evokes resonances between the Holy Spirit and several notions or concepts in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, primal religions, and Islam.

3.1.1. Hinduism

With regard to Hinduism, various concepts are introduced as evoking resonances with the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit.³³ The term *atman*, which means the self or the ultimate divine subject, has been used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit by Indian Christians in the Northern part of India. *Prana*, which means breath of life, corresponds with the biblical meaning of the Holy Spirit expressed in the Hebrew concept of *ru'ah* and Greek concept of *pneuma*. *Antarayamin* means the inner controller or indweller and resonates with Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit expressed by St. Paul when he writes, “the Spirit of God dwells in you (Rom 8:9).” *Ananda*, which means bliss or joy, is often understood with *sat* (being) *cit* (consciousness) as the ontological characteristics of Brahman, the Absolute. In late Vedanta and medieval Hindu *bhakti* literature, the three characteristics of Brahman are often called *saccidananda* suggesting the mystery of the Trinity of being, consciousness, and bliss. *Saccidananda* deeply resonates with the Christian understanding of the Holy Trinity of the Father (being), Son (word), and the

³² OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

Holy Spirit (love). *Sakti* denotes creative power or energy and is the female principle of a male divinity. The notion of *sakti* can be understood as an all pervasive power in creation and resonates with the work of the Holy Spirit in creation. Lastly, *Agni* signifies fire as part of *pavaka* which means purifier of fire and wind in a Vedic term which resonates with the Holy Spirit who is often symbolized as fire and wind.

The deep resonances between the Hindu concepts and the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit are followed by an important question raised by the Asian bishops. They asked, “Was the Spirit (apart from concepts congenial with the Spirit) present in the Indian Tradition?”³⁴ To this question, they answer, “Yes. If we are able to discern the signs of the Spirit we can read the history of Hinduism as a Holy history, where the Spirit has led our brothers and sisters to the depths of the mystery of God and leads them towards Christ.”³⁵ Meanwhile, it is important to note that the Asian bishops are not attempting to identify the work of the Holy Spirit to the Hindu concepts of *atman*, *prana*, *antarayamin*, *ananda*, *sakti*, *agni*. Their intension is to “review concepts that are part of Hindu belief and practice and which at the same time evoke resonances with the understanding of the Holy Spirit in Christianity.”³⁶

3.1.2. Buddhism

In their approach to Buddhism, Asian bishops acknowledge the challenge that their attempt “to find the idea of the Spirit in Buddhism would be an exercise in distortion of the very essence of Buddhism.”³⁷ This is especially because Buddhism, as a non-theistic religion, is different from Christianity not only on a conceptual level but also on a deeper structural level. The Asian bishops insist that one must respect the differences between Christianity and

³⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 7.

Buddhism, and “Buddhism must be taken on its own terms and understood within the framework of its concepts.”³⁸ Despite the radical differences, Asian bishops affirm that an encounter between the two religions is possible and desirable. They ask, “Where then is the meeting point? Not on the level of these concepts, but rather *on the level of experience of human life and the human quest for the transcendence*. . . . The meeting point will be beyond concepts, dogmas, symbols, and rituals at the level of experience.”³⁹ The human quest for transcendence is well expressed in the Buddhist teachings of the Four Noble Truths which are *dukkha* (suffering), *trsnā* (desire; origin of *dukkha*), *nirvana* (extinguishing; cessation of *dukkha*), eight-fold path (knowledge, discipline, morality, meditation etc.; path leading to cessation of *dukkha*).⁴⁰ As one walks the eight-fold path, he or she may experience the Four Sublime States which are *upeksa* (peace of mind), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy) and *maitri* (love). The Buddhist concept of devotion can be understood through the notion of *bodhisattva*, who attained enlightenment but refuses to enjoy his or her achievement and returns to this world to serve those who petition the assistance. The Asian bishops are convinced that the experience of the human quest for transcendence resonates with the work of the Holy Spirit. They note, “As Christians come to share something of the vision and experience of the Buddha as lived out in the lives of the people with whom they share the Asian heritage, what can they perceive but the work of the Spirit which they too have experienced?”⁴¹

3.1.3. Confucianism and Taoism

The Asian bishops also discuss the two Chinese religions that are Confucianism and Taoism. The teachings of Confucianism and Taoism have influenced China and its neighbouring

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 8, (Italics mine).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8-10.

⁴¹ Ibid., 12-13.

countries for longer than 2,500 years.⁴² The Asian bishops point out that the most important contribution of Confucianism to Chinese culture is “the education of every kind of people and the spread of learning not only of morality, but also of liberal arts, history, poetry and human behaviour.” The teachings of Confucius follow the spirit of *you chiao wu lei* (teaching anyone without discrimination).⁴³ The first sentence of *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*; the conversation between Confucius and his disciples) demonstrates the attitude of openness to a continuous process of learning, pointing out the endless nature of a human quest for transcendence. The sentence goes: “What a joyful thing to learn and to repeat what one has learned from time to time.”⁴⁴ The teachings of Confucius include virtues of responsibility, honest, loyalty, and fidelity through rén (仁, humaneness); yì (義, righteousness or justice); lǐ (禮, proper rite); zhì (智, knowledge); xìn (信, integrity). In Confucianism, the social harmony is a great virtue which can be achieved through every person’s knowing his or her place in the societal order.

In contrast to Confucianism, Taoist teachings emphasize the importance of natural harmony through a spiritual liberation from societal expectations. It is believed that Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, grew weary of the moral decay of life and lived as a solitary recluse in the unsettled areas of ancient China. The word *Tao* literally means the path or the way, and Lao Tzu uses the concept of *Tao* to explain the way of the cosmos.⁴⁵ According to Lao Tzu, union with the cosmos requires a person to live a life of *wu wei* which is non-action or selfless action without competition.⁴⁶ Accordingly, Lao Tzu encourages that one lives in selfless love like water as “water benefits the ten thousand things but does not compete with them.”⁴⁷ The peace and

⁴² Ibid., 13.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 16

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

contentment can come from being open to *Tao* and by adopting an attitude of openness that does not violate the process of nature.

In light of the teachings of Confucianism and Taoism, Asian bishops argue that the spiritual values of the two Chinese religions offer peace, harmony and meaning to Asian people. They say, “In many ways they [Confucianism and Taoism] reflect the workings of the Holy Spirit in the cosmos and particularly in humanity and its history. The Taoist virtues of docility, trust, humility, non-violence, detachment, equanimous love; and the Confucianist virtues of responsibility, honesty, loyalty, and fidelity are but manifestations of the fruits of the one Spirit of God working in all sorts of different ways in different people in the world.”⁴⁸

3.1.4. Primal Religions

Primal religions in Asia are divided into two groups. One group has a clear belief in one supreme being often called the Great Spirit, the Great One, or Heaven; another group has a belief in other in-between spirits which are more than humans but less than one supreme being.⁴⁹ The attitude of Asian people toward the world of a supreme being and the spirits is expressed in both awe and fear because it is believed that there are good spirits and evil spirits in the world. The widespread form of primal religions can be found in Shamanistic religious expressions in Asia. Shamans, in most Asian countries, are usually women who are believed to be in contact with the world of the spirits, and thus can lead shamanistic ceremonies for healing from a disease and protecting from evil spirits.⁵⁰ Although Shamanistic belief is widely practiced throughout Asia, primal religions are often considered to be culturally inferior and less developed, possibility because of their lack of scriptures or statements about their beliefs.⁵¹ The Asian bishops point out

⁴⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁵¹ Ibid., 23.

that primal religions were considered to have been influenced by evil spirits rather than the Holy Spirit who is at work in Christianity. However, since Vatican II, a more positive outlook towards non-Christian religions has developed.⁵² Accordingly, the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs of the FABC organized a conference on the attitude of the Church towards the indigenous peoples of Asia in 1995.⁵³ The religious traditions and practices of indigenous people were treated with dignity for the first time. The Asian bishops argue that “much of the indigenous people’s world view and ethos is compatible with the Christian faith,” and that “traditional beliefs, rites, myths and symbols of indigenous peoples provide material for developing indigenous theologies and liturgical ceremonies.”⁵⁴ They continue, “Christians are not only called to evangelize indigenous peoples but must be evangelized by them and learn from them new insights in areas such as ecology, community life and the celebration of life’s joys and tragedies.”⁵⁵ The Asian bishops contend that the presence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in primal religions needs to be recognized and appreciated.

3.1.5. Islam

The Asian bishops affirm the presence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s activity in Islam and say, “The Divine Spirit, who works unceasingly to renew the face of the universe, is also active in the religion of Islam to produce the Spirit’s inimitable fruits in the lives of Muslims. ... A study of Qur’an, the Sacred book of Islam, shows a constant effort to sow in the lives of believing Muslims those qualities that Christians recognize as the fruits of the Spirit.”⁵⁶ St. Paul describes the fruits of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness,

⁵² Ibid., 25-26.

⁵³ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 26-27.

gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23),” and these qualities are evidently shown in the lives of the people of Islam. The Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of love and compassion for the family and friends as well as strangers and the poor of the community. The Qu’ran exhorts, “Show kindness to your parents and to relatives, orphans, the needy, to the neighbour who is close to you as well as the neighbour who is a stranger, to the companion at your side and to the wayfarer, and to anyone who is under your control (Qr. 4:36).” The Asian bishops suggest that, although not always explicitly recognized, everyone meets Christ repeatedly in the person of the neighbour in need.⁵⁷ Accordingly, it can be understood that the people of Islam are prompted by Islamic faith and respond to Christ in love and service to their neighbour. The Asian bishops are convinced that “by forming friendships with Muslims, by coming to know better their faith and practices, and by working together with them for good, it is God’s Holy Spirit who is praised and worshipped.”⁵⁸

3.2. Discernment of the Spirit from an Asian Perspective

Reflection on the experiences of the Spirit in religio-cultural traditions in Asia brings to our attention an important question for discernment. The Asian bishops state, “We believe that the Spirit showers very special gifts on us at this moment in our Asian history as our Churches are struggling to become true local Churches. But it is the duty of us,[our duty as the Asian Church] the Asian Churches to discern the Spirit and its working in our midst.”⁵⁹ They continue, “Our spirituality is one of discerning the movement of the Spirit who re-enacts in us the mysteries of Jesus Christ in the contextual realities of daily living and struggling.”⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁹ OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” 91.

⁶⁰ “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia”: Statement of the fourth Plenary Assembly, a. 4.8.3., in FAPA I, 196.

concerns of Asian bishops with regard to discernment of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Asia resonate with Matthew's discernment of goodness by observing the fruit when dealing with false prophets (Matt. 7:15-20). It is exhorted that the disciples pick out the false prophets among the true prophets by the outcome as "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit (Matt. 7:18)". In this way, when we look at the good fruits of Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism in Asia, it is undeniable that those religions have made a great contribution to the history and culture of Asia.

In the document *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, the Asian bishops declare that their goal is to "discern the presence of the Spirit as expressed, believed, imaged and symbolized by believers themselves in these [Asian] traditions."⁶¹ They provide five criteria for discernment of the Holy Spirit, which are helpful but not limited to the following: the fruits of the Spirit, the values of the Kingdom, the sense of the faith of the Church, a listening attitude, and fostering love harmony and unity.⁶²

The first and most fundamental criterion for the discernment of the Spirit is the presence of the fruits of the Spirit which are described by St. Paul as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23)."⁶³ As a tree can be known by its fruit, the presence of these fruits of the Spirit affirms the presence of the Holy Spirit. The second criterion concerns the Kingdom of God which is wider than the institutional Church in its recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit outside the official structure of the Church. The Asian bishops argue that "the working of the Spirit of God in the history of humankind is to be understood and interpreted in relation to the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ."⁶⁴ The third

⁶¹ OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," 3. (Italics mine).

⁶² Ibid., 64-66.

⁶³ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 65.

criterion is the sense of the faith of the Church which begins by attending to the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling the reception of divine revelation in which God is fully encountered in humanity through Jesus Christ. The fourth criterion is a basic attitude of listening and openness to the guidance of the Spirit which is needed for the Church to become a community that hears the signs of the times in Asia. The fifth criterion for discernment of the Spirit is fostering love, harmony and unity, as St. Paul placed an emphasis on the importance of the unity that should exist along with the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12-14), among which love is the greatest (1 Cor. 13).⁶⁵

According to the Asian bishops, in the process of properly reflecting the voice of a truly local church, Asian theologians can first learn from the other religious traditions and then express what they have learned in a truly Asian way.⁶⁶ In doing so, a careful process of discernment of the Spirit is required. The Asian bishops, while acknowledging the presence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in an Asian context, emphasizes the importance of discernment of the Holy Spirit in the religio-cultural traditions in Asia. The approach of the Asian bishops to Pneumatology expressed in *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today* suggests an inductive dimension of Christian theology which draws from concrete life experience of the people in Asia. The Pneumatology from an Asian perspective indicates that the Spirit can be present and active outside the official structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

4. Religious Pluralism as a Lived Reality of Harmony in Asia

In understanding the issue of religious pluralism in Asia, and in further accepting the positive elements in Asian religions, the role of the Holy Spirit plays an important part in Asian

⁶⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁶ “Prayer – the Life of the Church of Asia”: Statements and Recommendations of the Second Plenary Assembly, a. 30-33, in FAPA I, 34-35.

theology. The notion of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit serves well in acknowledging the positive elements in Asian religions. The International Congress on the Mission of FABC professes:

We believe that the Spirit of the Lord calls each people and each culture to its own fresh and creative response to the gospel. Each local church has its own vocation in the one history of salvation, in one Church of Christ. In each local church each people's history, each people's culture, meanings and values, each people's traditions are taken up, not diminished not destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified if need be, and fulfilled (as the Second Vatican Council teaches) in the life of the Spirit.⁶⁷

The documents of Vatican II acknowledge the universal presence of the Holy Spirit who is at work in a manner only known to God (GS 22). Accordingly, the Asian bishops encourage Christians to expect to find mediations of divine revelation in their own cultures which are related to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

4.1. Receptive Pluralism

Following the teachings of Vatican II, the Asian bishops affirm that they “value pluralism as a great gift of the Spirit.”⁶⁸ The Asian bishops acknowledge a situation of pluralism that results from the different ways of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, which they call receptive pluralism. The Statement of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/3) affirms:

The presence of the Holy Spirit in and beyond the Church in Asia may be perceived in a variety of ways. This is due, in part, to the fact that people encounter the Spirit within their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, culture and worldviews. In this light, we affirm a stance of *receptive pluralism*. That is, the many ways of responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit must be continually in conversation with one another.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “International Congress on Mission”; Message of the Delegates Consensus Papers of the Workshops, a. 15, in FAPA I, 130.

⁶⁸ OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” 90.

⁶⁹ “BIRA IV/3”, Statement of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue, a. 16, in FAPA I, 261, (Italics in original).

The stance of receptive pluralism opens up a new horizon in which relationships and dialogues with people of other religions are encouraged, because such exchanges between different religious traditions will help us to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit while witnessing to diverse expressions of responding to the Spirit. In this way, various religious traditions in Asia become manifestations of “various responses to the working of the Spirit”⁷⁰ in a context that is shared by all Asians.

The position of receptive pluralism corresponds to the view taken at Vatican II in acknowledging the possibility of the diverse expressions for reception of divine revelation. *Dei Verbum* acknowledges the important role of the Holy Spirit which comes to us in faith when receiving revelation. In *Dei Verbum* it is stated, “It pleased God, in his [God’s] goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself [Godself] and to make known the mystery of his will” (DV 2). *Dei Verbum* continues, “By divine revelation God wished to manifest and communicate both himself [Godself] and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of mankind [humankind] (DV 6)”. According to these quotes, God not only reveals Godself but also enables us to receive and interpret the message from God. In other words, the divine self-communication to humanity requires a mutual relationship between God and humanity which not only refers to God’s revealing act, but also includes the reception of revelation on the part of humanity. Divine revelation is a communication in a mutual sense between God and humanity. This means that, when God reveals Godself through Christ, the obedience of faith must be given to God in order for us to be able to receive God’s self-gift fully. As God reveals Godself as a person through Jesus Christ, humanity responds to revelation as a person through a total commitment in faith. This free obedience of faith happens by having “the interior help of the Holy Spirit, who moves

⁷⁰ OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” 90.

the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth (DV 5).” With the help of the Holy Spirit, the human receiver is involved in the reception and actualization of communication with God.

The view taken in *Dei Verbum* deeply resonates with the position of receptive pluralism which acknowledges pluralism in expressions for receiving divine revelation. The reception of divine revelation involves the human element of faith which takes place within the very context of humanity. As a consequence, there occurs a plurality of expressions of the reception of divine revelation due to the plural nature of the human context. Accordingly, genuine diversity is revealed in many ways of expressing faith in doctrine, life and worship in different times, circumstances and cultures. The freedom of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated in the diversity of expressions of the reception of divine revelation by humanity within a multitude of contexts and situations.

The position of receptive pluralism through the universal presence of the Holy Spirit does not suggest a separation between the mission of the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Son. This is due to the fact that the freedom of the Holy Spirit does not bring forth new revelation beyond what is revealed in Jesus Christ, who is “both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation (DV 2)” as witnessed in Scripture and Tradition. The Asian bishops clearly indicate that “there is no Spirit without the Word; and there is no Word without the Spirit.”⁷¹ God’s self-gift to humanity is given through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit enables the reception of God’s self-gift. Therefore, the mission of the Son revealed in the coming of Jesus Christ is manifested in the faith of Christianity; the mission of the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in its enabling the reception of divine revelation through Jesus Christ. While the mission of the Holy

⁷¹ Ibid., 65.

Spirit is universal in this world and thus important in understanding the possibility of plural expressions of divine revelation in the world, the same Spirit also plays a significant role within Christianity in enabling the reception of divine revelation through Jesus Christ. Without the mission of the Holy Spirit, divine self-communication in Jesus Christ may remain as a closed revelation without continuous renewal of our reception of the divine self-gift. For this reason, the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit are of equal importance.

Furthermore, the inspiration of Scripture and receiving and handing on of Tradition can constantly be renewed with the help of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the Church. By enabling the reception of revelation within the Church, the Holy Spirit continues to help the Church to be in unity, catholicity, apostolicity and holiness. In this sense, the Church is always itself but never the same, as it is carried through history by the Spirit of reception. Pope John Paul II suggests:

Moreover, the universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the body of Christ, which is the Church. Indeed, it is always the Spirit who is at work, both when he gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples, guiding the Church to discover these gifts, to foster them and to receive them through dialogue. Every form of the Spirit's presence is to be welcomed with respect and gratitude, but the discernment of this presence is the responsibility of the Church, to which Christ gave his Spirit in order to guide her into all the truth.⁷²

The catholic unity finds diverse expressions in human history and constitutes an apostolic Church by faithfully following the teachings of Jesus Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit. This apostolicity is experienced in the commitment of Christians in diverse contexts involving various expressions of witness and worship of God. The Holy Spirit enables the reception of divine

⁷² Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican (1990), a. 29. Available online: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html. Accessed Aug 13, 2014.

revelation within and outside the institutional Church, thereby bringing about the renewal of the Church as well as receptive pluralism of theologies in diverse contexts.

4.2. The Spirit of Harmony in the Midst of Religious Pluralism in Asia

As discussed above, religious pluralism as receptive pluralism does not necessarily mean negativity against one another in a society, but rather it becomes a source of theology that reflects the spirit of harmony in Asia. The positive view on pluralism is based on the concept of harmony, which is an essential ethos in Asian cultures. Harmony in Asian societies is well illustrated in the East Asian concept of *yin* and *yang*. According to the Chinese tradition, opposites are complementary and not competitive as *yang* initiates and *yin* completes.⁷³ Both *yin* and *yang*, while in a harmonious state, find wholeness in each other, indicating that values and concepts that are constituted in our society are to be completed by one another. In short, the fundamental understanding of *yin* and *yang* is that the opposites are not mutually exclusive of each other. The principle of harmony further implies that all of humanity is somewhat interdependent. It is from this point of view that the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC asserts that “Asian religious cultures see human beings, society and the whole universe as intimately related and interdependent. Fragmentation and division contradict this vision.”⁷⁴ Asian bishops further suggest, “Above all, there is an Asian approach to reality, a world-view, wherein the whole is the sum-total of the web of relationships and interaction of the various parts with each other, in a word, *harmony*, a word which resonates with all Asian cultures.”⁷⁵ The Asian bishops also point out, “harmony seems to constitute in a certain sense the intellectual and affective,

⁷³ OTC, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” 19.

⁷⁴ “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia”: Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly, a. 3.1.10, in FAPA I, 181.

⁷⁵ Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” *FABC Papers*, no. 75 (March, 1996), 66. (Italics in original).

religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia.”⁷⁶

Thomas Fox captures the Asian concept of harmony when he says, “Asians are not as quick to divide large metaphysical concepts in two as traditional Western Aristotelian thought has done for millennia. Asians prefer to unite, not divide. Good and evil are less two sides of a coin than places on a large prism... the emphasis here is on achieving wholeness, mystical unity, oneness.”⁷⁷ With regard to the significance of the notion of harmony, Edmund Kee-Fook Chia contends, “If there is one concept or notion which undergirds all of FABC's theological thrust, then it is the notion of ‘harmony’.”⁷⁸

For people in Asia, harmony among pluralism is possible without involving relativism because reality is “one and multidimensional.”⁷⁹ A distinction between pluralism and relativism is made by the Office of Theological Concerns of FABC in which relativism is viewed as a threat that destroys the rich meaning of pluralism.

When a point of view lacks a common reference to reality, it amounts to the mere opinion of the subject who holds that opinion. When each and every such point of view that is cut off from a common reference to reality is assigned an equal value, then, it amounts to relativism. In other words, relativism holds that there are many truths which vary according to the subjects who hold different opinions of reality. Such relativism destroys the rich meaning of pluralism. ... However, ... [p]eople gradually came to realize that there are many points of view from which to look at reality, and many linguistic patterns through which we interpret it. ... Pluralism need not always entail a radical subjectivism or relativism in the sense of claiming that all points of view are equally valid.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ “BIRA IV/1”: Report on the Assembly of the First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue, a. 13. b. in FAPA I, 249.

⁷⁷ Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 41.

⁷⁸ Edmund Chia, “Thirty Years of FABC: History, Foundation, Context and Theology” *FABC Papers*, no. 106 (2003), 51. Available online: http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_106.pdf. Accessed Aug. 13, 2014.

⁷⁹ OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology,” 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Thus, in light of harmony, pluralism in Asia is a lived reality which does not always involve relativism. This affirms that the plurality resides in the diversity of a conceptual framework within which the reality is articulated. The Asian bishops refer to St. Thomas Aquinas when he makes a distinction between expression and reality and says, “the act of faith terminates not in the expression, but in the reality itself (S.Th. II-II, q.1, a.2 ad 2).”⁸¹ When dealing with the divine mystery which a human cannot fully comprehend, the expression always falls short of reality. Due to the limitation of expression, there cannot be one perfect expression which can cover the reality of divine mystery. In this way, additional expressions are beneficial in order to have a fuller understanding of the mystery. The diversity in ways of experiencing and expressing reality becomes more significant in the context of Asia due to the fact that “in Asian way of perceiving, ... experience has priority over rational knowledge”⁸² Moreover, the diverse experiences are concrete reality which can constitute a meaning of life in the midst of religious pluralism in an Asian context. Harmony, as the greatest virtue in an Asian context, can be understood by acknowledging “the human search for an underlying unity that enables us to understand plurality better.”⁸³

Most Asian cultures adopt the holistic approach to pluralism which is based on the virtue of harmony. Thus, many Asian cultures value the spirit of “religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence”.⁸⁴ Vimal Tirimanna notes that Asian religious cultures are primarily cultures of harmony, meaning that the spirit of harmony is encouraged in Asia even in seemingly contradictory situations. Tirimanna continues to indicate that it is not difficult to find such

⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Tirimanna, “A Few Ethical Contours that emerge from the FABC teachings for an Asian Moral Theology” in *Reaping a Harvest from the Asian Soil*, 170.

situations in Asia where “opposites can exist side by side without necessarily being in conflict with each other. Neither is there any need to eliminate them, for in fact, they do complement each other in attaining fullness or completeness.”⁸⁵ In a similar vein, the Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/11) states,

[P]eace and harmony in Asian societies, composed as they are of many cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups, would require recognition of legitimate pluralism and respect for all the groups. Unity, peace and harmony are to be realized in diversity. Diversity is not something to be regretted and abolished, but to be rejoiced over and promoted, since it represents the richness and strength. Harmony is not simply the absence of strife, described as ‘live and let live’. The test of true harmony lies in the acceptance of diversity as richness.⁸⁶

Religious and cultural pluralism is a lived reality in Asia these days, especially due to the various historical, geographical, social and commercial and political changes. Thus, cultures and religions are also going through the changes which allow people to recognize the possibility of radically different points of view. Today, many independent nations embrace the concept of democracy which advocates respect for a diversity of opinions. Accordingly, religious pluralism is also considered to be respected without coercing or pressuring others to change. Rather than suggesting relativism, many Asian philosophies and theologies seek unity and harmony in the midst of pluralism. Asian bishops argue that the position of relativism is to be rejected in an Asian context because relativizing of reality, especially relativizing of basic human values, was condemned by all of the major Asian religions.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Vimal Tirimanna, Csr. “Some Salient Contributions of the FABC to the Asian Churches during the Past 40 Years,” *Asian Horizons*, vol. 6, no. 4, (Dec 2012), 601, Available online: http://files.www.catholicethics.com/resources/publications/06.04.2012.1_Vimal_Tirimanna.pdf. Accessed Aug 13, 2014.

⁸⁶ “BIRA IV/11”: Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue, a. IV. 15, in *FAPA I*, 321.

⁸⁷ OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, 6.

Conclusion

Earlier in this paper, I introduced Crowe's questions which are: "How should we conceive of the overarching order of a universe when we give equal attention to the presence of Son and to the presence of the Spirit?"⁸⁸ and "How will our understanding of non-Christians as gifted with the Spirit affect our general attitude and relationship to them?"⁸⁹ Crowe's questions are from his concern about practical binitarianism in the Roman Catholic Church which does not deny the three persons of the Trinity on a doctrinal level but practices as if there are only two persons of the Father and the Son in the Trinity. Crowe argues that acknowledging the universal mission of the Holy Spirit will help to balance our understanding of the Trinitarian missions by retrieving the significance of the data of consciousness that is experienced through the mission of the Holy Spirit.

This essay was an attempt to provide an answer to Crowe's question from an Asian perspective. I argue that our understanding of non-Christians as gifted with the Spirit *does* significantly affect our general attitude and relationship to them in recognizing the good and holy element present in diverse contexts as expressions of receptions of divine revelation through the help of the Holy Spirit. The Pneumatology from an Asian perspective also affects our approach to the diverse contexts of theology so as to be inclusive and holistic in recognizing the presence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and in seeking harmony among diverse expressions of faith in religio-cultural traditions in Asia.

In conclusion, I contend that Christian theology is capable of interacting within diverse contexts including the Asian context out of its own internal history and resources, through an understanding of the presence of the Holy Spirit which extends beyond the official structures of

⁸⁸ Crowe, *Christ and History*, 220.

⁸⁹ Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit, and World Religions," 333.

the Church. The mission of the Holy Spirit is active in this world of religious pluralism in witnessing to the deep connection with God that suggests harmony among all of life. In this paper, as I elaborated on the role of religions in view of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit, I consulted works of Frederick E. Crowe and the papers of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), particularly focusing on the document *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*. I first presented the specific character of Asian theology with regard to religious pluralism. Secondly I discussed the philosophy of interiority in Roman Catholic theology and a balance between the Trinitarian missions suggested by Crowe. Thirdly, I examined the Pneumatology from an Asian perspective expressed in *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*. Lastly, I discussed religious pluralism as a lived reality that reflects the spirit of harmony in Asia. The notion of receptive pluralism was introduced with a holistic approach to Pneumatology in emphasizing harmony.

The efforts of FABC for inculturation of Christianity in an Asian context to develop a holistic and inclusive Pneumatology can contribute to a theology of religions in the world as the issue of religious pluralism extends beyond the continent of Asia with an Asian immigrant population continuously increasing in North America. Cultural and religious pluralism confronts us today more or less everywhere in North America which is often described as multicultural society. In today's world, cultural pluralism is no longer understood as geographically separate cultures and societies. The world we live in today consists not of separated societies but of different cultures and religions co-existing within a society. In this world of the global village, Christians are confronted with a challenge to live in peace and harmony with all while remaining faithful to their Christian beliefs. With regard to this challenge, *Nostra Aetate* exhorts: "Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and

encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture (NA 2).” The Asian theologians’ efforts for the inculturation of Christianity in an Asian context can provide a concrete example of embracing diversity while remaining faithful to the teachings of the universal Church. Therefore, the inter-religious dialogue within the process of Christian inculturation in Asia can be beneficial for the good of the whole Church in the world of religious pluralism. I will conclude this paper in the words of Bernard Lonergan on the potential contribution of the local theologies to the universal Church.

While the existence of division and the slowness in recovering unity are deeply to be lamented, it is not to be forgotten that division resides mainly in the cognitive meaning of the Christian message. The constitutive meaning and the effective meaning are matters on which most Christians very largely agree. Such agreement, however, needs expression and, while we await common cognitive agreement, the possible expression is collaboration in fulfilling the redemptive and constructive roles of the Christian church in human society.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Lonergan, *Method in theology*, 368.

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