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## **Migration in Asia and Its Missiological Implications: Insights from the Migration Theology of the Federation of Asians Bishops' Conferences (FABC)**

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### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to explore an emerging theology of migration and its missiological implications in the official documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The FABC asserts that migration cannot be separated from the complex interplay of social, economic, class, religious, and political factors that interact to displace people from their homelands. Its emerging theology of migration is rooted in its threefold theological vision of (i) commitment and service to life, (ii) triple dialogue with Asian cultures, religions and the poor, and (iii) with the aim of advancing the Reign of God in Asia. In practical terms, the FABC's theology of migration begins with social analysis that questions the poverty, economic marginalization, racial, political and religious tensions, environmental degradation, as well as many Asian nations' heavy dependence on the remittances of their nationals as economic migrants, which lie at the heart of the ever growing numbers of migrants. However, the FABC goes beyond mere social analysis of the dehumanizing conditions that are endured by migrants when it seeks to undergird its migration theology within its broader theological threefold dialogue with the quintessentially Asian realities of diverse cultures, religions, and the immense poverty. Finally, the FABC is convinced that its theology of migration needs to take seriously the intercultural and interreligious implications of migration and integrate the intercultural and interreligious dimensions in its pastoral care of migrants.

### **Keywords**

Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), Asia, Catholic, mission, migration, intercultural, interreligious, religious pluralism, religious diversity, pastoral care

This essay seeks to investigate an emerging theology of migration and its missiological implications in the official documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), as the FABC grapples with this complex issue. It is primarily an exploration of the FABC's theological understanding of

migration and its missiological implications in the context of the immense religious diversity and pluralism in Asia today, with a focus on how the FABC deals with the intersecting issues of migration, human struggles, intercultural and interreligious encounters, as well as missiological outreach. While this essay may be limited to the *theological responses* of the Asian Catholic bishops to migration and its implications for mission outreach within the context of intercultural and interreligious encounters in Asia, nevertheless it provides us with a good overview of how the Asian Catholic bishops have chosen to address the complex interplay of theology, missiology, as well as intercultural and interreligious concerns in its approach to migrants and migrations. It is not the intent of this essay to examine detailed and critical discussions on the nature and form of migrations, migratory movements and their implications on gender, families, communities, and societies in view of the fact that there are excellent critical studies on migration and its broad theological and missiological implications in Asia (e.g., Cruz 2010, Baggio and Brazal 2008), migration through the lens of biblical texts (e.g., Ruiz 2011), as well as migration and gender (e.g., Parreñas 2001, Bonifacio and Angeles 2009).

### *Migration in Asia*

The phenomenon of migration in Asia has a long, varied, and complex history stretching back thousands of years. Beginning with the nomadic tribes that wandered the vast expanse of the Asian continent in search of water and grazing lands, the trade caravans that travelled on the famed Silk Routes across vast stretches of Asia, and the invading armies that displaced peoples and communities from their ancestral lands, migration has always defined the Asian continent in every age. While nomadic tribes and trade caravans have come and gone, large-scale migration continues unabated in Asia. The principal difference between then and now is the fact that the pace of migration was much slower three thousand years ago, when the first caravans ventured far beyond familiar territory in search of new trading opportunities.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the beginning of massive migration patterns that was facilitated by the great steamships, propeller airplanes, and transcontinental railways. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world is witnessing the growth of large scale *internal* and *external* displacements that are made possible by affordable international travel, advanced telecommunications, and broadband internet. Today's migration patterns in Asia include internal migration from rural to urban centers (e.g., Chinese youth leaving rural farms to work in large nondescript factories in the coastal

regions of China), external migration from economic depressed countries to economic booming countries (e.g., Filipinos leaving their homeland to work as construction workers, nurses, engineers, etc., in oil-rich Arab nations), as well as refugees fleeing violence and persecutions. Migration can be voluntary (e.g., economic migrants in search of jobs) or forced (e.g., refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons who are fleeing persecution in their homelands).

At the same time, migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, is ambiguous: it is welcome by some and resented by others. On the one hand, the abundant array of ethnic restaurants, galleries and festivals is often welcomed because they add spice and zesty variety to otherwise staid lives. On the other hand, complaints of cultural assaults, cultural relativism, and cultural pollution are growing increasingly frequent and strident. Indeed, migration becomes the bogeyman that embodies the fear, uncertainty, and insecurity about a community's self-identity vis-à-vis others, leading to the absolutization of its ethnic and cultural identity against what it perceives as the threat of encroachment by others. In extreme cases, it can stir up feelings of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, racism, and nationalism.

Moreover, one also has to acknowledge the reality that today's large-scale globalized migration patterns are fueled and abetted by immense poverty and extreme social-economic imbalances, violent ethnic and religious strife, as well as the insatiable demand for cheap labor and cheap products. The magnitude of this problem is especially dire in Asia. Many Asians are migrants, whether willingly or unwillingly. Voluntary migrations are often exemplified by the many Filipinos, Indonesians, Indians, Bangladeshis, Chinese, and others who seek better opportunities outside their homelands as construction workers, domestic helpers, factory workers, etc. Involuntary migrants include not just refugees who are fleeing wars, social strife, economic upheavals, political instability, religious tensions and persecution, but also the many economic migrants, especially vulnerable women and children, who are exploited and trafficked by underworld gangs, smuggling networks, and secret societies for cheap labor and sex trafficking. The sheer violence and abject dehumanization that many of these women and children experience reveal the dark underbelly of migration and calls for a concerted response on the part of everyone to redress these problems.

At the same time, migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, documented or undocumented, is more than transnational or global population mobility *simpliciter*. Migration leads to the commodification and exploitation of the human person, resulting in the abuse and dehumanizing of the human person.

As the Indian theologian S. Arokiasamy explains, migration “reveals the vulnerability of people’s lives, their insecurity, exploitation, joblessness, uprootedness, political uncertainty and humiliating treatment as outsiders or foreigners” (Arokiasamy 1995). Writing from both personal experience and academic research, the Vietnamese American Catholic theologian, Peter Phan draws attention to the “existential condition of a transnational immigrant and refugee,” which includes “violent uprootedness, economic poverty, anxiety about the future, and the loss of national identity, political freedom, and personal dignity” (Phan 2003:8).

In addition, the movement of peoples also brings about the movement of religions. As Muslims from Mindanao move into predominantly Christian Sabah, Filipinos work in predominantly Muslim nations in the Middle East, etc., the implications of migration for interfaith relations can no longer be ignored. Indeed, migration leads to an increasing cultural diversity and religious pluralism in different parts of Asia. This raises difficult questions of the pastoral care of Christian migrants and refugees in predominantly non-Christian regions of Asia (e.g., the large influx of Filipino migrant workers in the Middle East), as well as non-Christian migrants and refugees in predominantly Christian regions (e.g., Indonesian Muslim undocumented migrant workers in the Sabah or the Philippines).

### **Understanding the FABC’s Theological Orientation**

The FABC is a transnational body comprising fifteen Asian Catholic Bishops’ Conferences as full members, viz., Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as ten associate members, viz., Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan, Macau, Mongolia, Nepal, Siberia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and East Timor. The foundation for the FABC was laid at an historic meeting of 180 Asian Catholic Bishops in Manila during the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Philippines in November 1970 (Chia 2003, Fox 2002). The FABC convenes in Plenary Assembly, the highest body, with the participation of all presidents and delegates of member conferences once in every four years. To-date nine plenary assemblies have been held, with the tenth plenary assembly scheduled for November 2012. The ten plenary assemblies are: FABC I: Evangelization in Modern Day Asia (Taipei, Taiwan, 1974), FABC II: Prayer – the Life of the Church in Asia (Calcutta, India, 1978), FABC III: The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia (Bangkok, Thailand, 1982),

FABC IV: The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia (Tokyo, Japan, 1986), FABC V: Journeying Together Toward The Third Millennium (Bandung, Indonesia, 1990), FABC VI: Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life (Manila, Philippines, 1995), FABC VII: A Renewed Church in Asia on a Mission of Love and Service (Sampran, Thailand, 2000), FABC VIII: The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life (Daejeon, South Korea, 2004), FABC IX: Living the Eucharist in Asia (Manila, Philippines, 2009), and FABC X: FABC at Forty: Responding to the Challenges of Asia (Xuan Loc, Vietnam, 2012).

From its inception, the FABC has sought to make a significant contribution to the development and growth of the spiritual and theological life of the Asian local churches through its Plenary Assemblies, as well as congresses, consultations, colloquia, conferences, and symposia that are organized by its various offices. These offices are the FABC Central Secretariat, 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, and Office of Clergy and Office of Consecrated Life.

In its official documents, the FABC has proceeded on the basis that the Asian continent, with its teeming masses and their rich diversity and plurality of religions, cultures, and philosophical worldviews require a distinctively threefold Asian theological response to the manifold socio-economic challenges, i.e., (i) undergirded by a commitment and service to life, (ii) oriented toward a threefold dialogue with Asian cultures, religions and the poor, and (iii) with the goal of seeking to bring about the Reign of God in Asia (Tan 2000, 2004, 2005). Indeed, the FABC's emerging theology of migration can be understood as a natural outgrowth from this threefold theological framework.

It is true that the early documents of the FABC did not deal directly with the issue of migration and its challenges. A survey of the FABC documents in the 1970s and 1980s reveals only minor references to migrants in the *Syllabus of "Mission Concerns"* of BIMA III (1982) and the Final Statement of BIMA IV (1988). Specifically, article 11 of BIMA III's *Syllabus of "Missionary Concerns"* states: "Pastoral care for the great number of Asians who have emigrated from their homelands for economic reasons demands the serious missionary concern of the churches" (Rosales & Arévalo 1992:108) while BIMA IV encourages the bishops to "[u]se the mobility and migration of the faithful as an opportunity to spread the Gospel of Christ" and "inspire, educate, and organize . . . migrants to be witnesses of Christ wherever they may go" (Rosales & Arévalo 1992:294). In the absence of any formal statement from the FABC during this period,

individual episcopal conferences in Asia released their own statements on migration, e.g., Philippines in 1988, Taiwan in 1989, and Japan in 1993 (Battistella 1995).

### **FABC V: Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium (1990)**

The major turning point came with the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly, which was held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1990 with the theme, “Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium.” In its Final Statement, the FABC Plenary Assembly acknowledged the injustice of both voluntary and involuntary migration in the Asian milieu:

We are deeply conscious, therefore, that within our context of change there is the unchanging reality of injustice. There remains in Asia massive poverty. . . . Poverty likewise drives both men and women to become migrant workers, often destroying family life in the process. Political conflict and economic desperation have driven millions to become refugees, to living for years in camps that are sometimes in effect crowded prisons (FABC V, art. 2.2.1, in Rosales & Arévalo 1992:276–277).

In response, FABC V asserts that the Christian community “must live in *companionship*, as true *partners* with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, and as they search for the meaning of human life and progress.” The Asian Bishops insist that the Church must walk in solidarity with the Asian peoples who are the “exploited women and workers, unwelcome refugees, victims of violations of human rights” in their quest for God and for a better human life. The Church will also serve them in a spirit of compassion that also seeks to “denounce, in deeds, if it is not possible to do so in words, the injustices, oppressions, exploitations, and inequalities resulting in so much of the suffering that is evident in the Asian situation” (FABC V, arts. 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4, in Rosales & Arévalo 1992:283,284).

### **FABC-OHD: Journeying Together in Faith with the Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia (1993)**

Following in the footsteps of FABC V, which had included migration as one of the many issues facing the Asian Church as it journeys toward the third Christian millennium, the FABC Office of Human Development (FABC-OHD)

continued the discussion by organizing a symposium on Filipino migrant workers in Asia. This symposium was held in Hong Kong in 1993 and was attended by delegates of the episcopal conferences and diocesan commissions in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The Final Statement of this symposium entitled “Journeying Together in Faith with the Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia” began by acknowledging the contributions of millions of migrant workers from the Philippines to the growing global economy (Eilers 1997:47). While it acknowledges that migration does have “both positive and negative effects on the country of origin as well as the receiving country” (Eilers 1997:48–49), it points out those Filipino migrant workers, male and female alike, often experience serious human rights abuses. For example, Filipino women, who are often employed in the domestic and entertainment sectors, are “frequently submitted to humiliation, harassment and sexual abuse” (Eilers 1997:50). Filipino men, who comprise the single largest national group in the seafarers and fish workers sector, not only “face physical and verbal abuse,” but also experience difficulties in claiming compensation for disabilities (Eilers 1997:50). Moreover, the symposium participants also recognized the consequences of migration for the disintegration of the family unit with deleterious effects on children and their parents (Eilers 1997:50). The symposium delegates explored the implications of migration on families and concluded:

There is a very urgent need to take seriously the implications of migration on marriage and family life. The social, spiritual and moral implications need urgent assessment by all. Husbands separated from wives, and children from parents are a direct consequences of contract labor migration, showing signs of breakdown of both marriages and families (Eilers 1997:55).

On the theological aspects of migration, the symposium delegates viewed migration as a reality that not only points to the birth of a new world order based on the growing interdependence among nations, but also confirms the fundamental right of every person to migrate freely because “the world belongs to everyone” (Eilers 1997:51). They also reiterated that the Asian Church has to

accompany the Migrant as a Human Person, following the example of Christ himself. This journeying of the Church together with the Migrant Worker, is the sign of solidarity within the universal Church and a sharing in the common evangelizing mission entrusted to all the followers of Christ. Growing in faith as a local Church, made up of people of different nationalities is a new sign of unity (Eilers 1997:53).

In addition, the symposium delegates affirmed that migration should not be forced and insisted that migrants' human rights must be respected and they should not be subject to inhumane working and living conditions (Eilers 1997:52). At the same time, they also urged both the originating and receiving churches to address the root causes of migration and its negative impact on migrants. They emphasized that churches which are receiving migrants ought to commit to serving migrants, welcoming and assisting these migrants to "relate, participate and integrate themselves to the local Church in the various activities, and at the same time be able to share their faith and cultural heritage with the local Church and people," as well as constantly seeking to address the painful and dehumanizing situation in the lives of these migrants (Eilers 1997:53). This is because local receiving churches have the responsibility to protect the rights and promote the dignity of these migrant workers, working "closely with the local Government to make available services to the migrants who are a very important part of the labour force and contribute to the economy and society" (Eilers 1997:54).

#### **FABC VI: Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life (1995)**

The next plenary assembly, FABC VI, which was held in Manila in 1995, briefly highlighted "the insecurity and vulnerability of migrants, refugees, the displaced ethnic and indigenous peoples, and the pain and agonies of exploited workers, especially the child laborers in our countries" (FABC VI, art. 7, in Eilers 1997:4). At this plenary assembly, the Asian Bishops characterized the plight of migrants as follows:

Special attention is given to the displaced in our societies: political and ecological refugees and migrant workers. They are marginalized and exploited by the system, denied of their place in society and must go elsewhere to seek a dignified life. In welcoming them we expose the causes of their displacement, work toward conditions for a more human living in community, experience the universal dimension of the Kingdom (Gal 3:28) and appreciate new opportunities for evangelization and intercultural dialogue (FABC VI, art. 15.5, in Eilers 1997:11).

#### **FABC's Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century (1997)**

Two years later, the topic of migration came up as one of the major issues that were discussed at the FABC's Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century (Pattaya City, Thailand, 1997), which was organized by the FABC

Office of Human Development (FABC-OHD) and focused on the theme of “Towards a Communion and Solidarity in the Context of Globalization.” On the issue of migrants and their challenges, the colloquium participants suggested that dioceses intervene more actively to “take up the cause of migrant workers through the legal process of the host country by providing financial support and lawyers to fight for their rights” (Eilers 2002:40). The Final Statement of this Colloquium also outlines four practical steps that the Asian Bishops could implement to address the challenges and needs of migrants and their families:

- (1) Initiate bilateral meetings of the migrant commission of Episcopal conferences.
- (2) Elaborate formation programs for pastoral workers for migrants, first at the national level, and then perhaps also organising regional initiatives for this.
- (3) Insert pastoral care of families of migrants within the diocesan pastoral programs, particularly where migrants are numerous, dialogue between sending and receiving churches, beginning with.
- (4) Link the issue of migration with the issue of labour in general for a more comprehensive understanding and unified action on it (Eilers 2002:40).

#### **FABC VII: A Renewed Church in Asia on a Mission of Love and Service (2000)**

At the beginning of the third Christian Millennium, the issue of migration was discussed at the Seventh Plenary Assembly (Samphran, Thailand, 2000) of the FABC. At this plenary assembly, the Asian bishops expressed grave concern over the ever-growing migration and refugee movements and called for an urgent and adequate pastoral response to address the dehumanizing plight of these refugees:

In the light of the teaching of the Church, we affirm that migration and refugee movements, which result in depersonalization, loss of human dignity and the break up of families, are moral issues confronting the conscience of the Church and that of our Asian nations. As for the Church in Asia, these pose urgent pastoral challenges to evolve life-giving, service-oriented programs of action within the pastoral mission of the Church. The Church should join hands with all who are concerned with the rights of the migrants and their situation, keeping in mind that the migrants themselves are to be the primary agents of change (FABC VII, art. 5, in Eilers 2002:11).

#### **FABC VIII: The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life (2004)**

The Asian Bishops further developed their theology of migration at their Eighth Plenary Assembly (Daejeon, South Korea, 2004), which focused on Asian

families and the challenges they face in their daily life struggles. In their final statement, they identified the twin forces of globalization and urbanization that account for the bulk of contemporary migration patterns in Asia (Eilers 2007:6). After observing that millions of economic migrants in undeveloped regions of Asia often leave their families behind to search for jobs in the economically more developed regions of Southeast Asia or the Middle East, the Asian Bishops expressed their grave concern over the terrible ruptures to healthy family bonds that are caused by these extreme migratory patterns as families are broken up and children deprived of one or both their parents (FABC VIII, art. 15, in Eilers 2007:6). They also warned of the cultural dislocations and breakdown in family and communal ties between these migrants and their families and communities back home (FABC VIII, art. 16, in Eilers 2007:7) and concluded that “migrant workers and their families urgently need great pastoral care from the churches of sending and receiving countries” (FABC VIII, art. 17, in Eilers 2007:7).

#### **FEISA V: Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees: A New Way of Being Church (2002)**

It was the Faith Encounters in Social Action (FEISA) that took the FABC Plenary Statements one step further beyond mere pastoral care of migrants to make explicit the connection between migration and interreligious dialogue. Organized by the FABC-OHD, Faith Encounters in Social Action (FEISA) seeks to promote interreligious dialogue through social involvement, emphasizing that the Asian Church needs to ground its mission and outreach in a threefold dialogue with the Asian peoples in the fullness of their cultures, religious traditions, and their poverty (Eilers 2007:89). Specifically FEISA V, entitled “From Distrust to Respect... Reject to Welcome’: Study Days on Undocumented Migrants and Refugees” met in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia in 2002. Its final statement, which is entitled “Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees: A New Way of Being Church,” is a thorough discussion on the challenges faced by undocumented migrants and refugees and what the Asian Church could do to respond to these challenges.

FEISA V takes as its starting point the insistence of Pope John Paul II in his 1996 World Migration Day Message on Undocumented Migrants that “a migrant’s irregular legal status cannot allow him/her to lose his/her dignity, since he/she is endowed with inalienable rights, which can neither be violated nor ignored” (Eilers 2007:111, see also John Paul II:1996). It goes on to insist that

both undocumented migrants and asylum seekers “remain children of God” and “deserve Christian love and protection” to maintain their human dignity, notwithstanding that they often “have no legal right to remain in a given national territory” (Eilers 2007:111). While FEISA V reiterates “the inalienable dignity and rights of people on the move” and “acknowledges the right of sovereign nation-states to regulate the movement of people across their borders,” it is equally insistent that “this right must be exercised at the service of the universal common good” (Eilers 2007:117). As it explains:

People on the move must not be reduced to instruments of economic or political strategies. All of their human rights must be respected. The freedom of people to move should be preserved and restrictions imposed only where this is necessary in order to protect the common good. People have a right to move in order to seek safety, freedom and a decent level of material welfare (Eilers 2007:117).

Hence, FEISA V insists that the Asian Church should treat all migrants alike in its pastoral outreach, whether they are documented or undocumented, and whatever their motivations may be for leaving their homelands:

Whatever the reason is, the Church that embodies the mission of Christ cannot remain indifferent to issues relating/affecting people on the move. The Church that is universal both in outlook and in its essence is duty bound to learn from the migrants and at the same time, respond to their needs (Eilers 2007:114).

It insists that the first thing that Asian Church workers should do is “to listen to people in an irregular situation or in search of asylum, in order to know exactly what their situation is, and also provide them with their basic needs,” which is “in accordance with the Church’s preferential, although not exclusive, option for the poorest,” because “even asylum-seekers and migrants in an illegal situation have the right to be provided with the necessary means of subsistence” (Eilers 2007:115). As it explains:

Christian solidarity simply sees the need to take care of human beings, especially young people, minors and children who are incapable of defending themselves because they lack protection under the law and often do not know the language of the country in which they have been obliged to seek refuge due to natural catastrophes, wars, violence, persecution, even genocide in their own country or due to existing economic conditions such as to endanger their physical integrity or life itself (Eilers 2007:115).

FEISA V also makes explicit the connection between the FABC’s threefold dialogue with the cultures, religions, and immense poverty of the Asian peoples,

insisting that the Asian Church “seeks to defend the dignity and rights of people on the move regardless of their race, religion and legal status,” and in particular, “paying attention not only to the practical and physical needs, but also to their social, psychological and spiritual needs” (Eilers 2007:118). On the issue of poverty and migration, FEISA V acknowledges the reality of poverty as the force behind much of the mass migrations in Asia, whether internal or external, voluntary or involuntary and insists that the Asian Church should stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized (Eilers 2007:128–129).

It is the dialogue with cultures and religions that gives FEISA V an avenue to break new ground. On the one hand, FEISA V acknowledges that the problems of migration are legion and arise “because of the terrible situation surrounding the migration phenomenon: of injustice, discrimination, violence, violation of rights, inhuman living and working conditions, and fear especially for those who are undocumented, etc.” (Eilers 2007:113). But on the other hand, FEISA V asserts that it is also “an opportunity, because in our globalised world, it gives concrete chances for people of different nationalities, cultures and creeds to come together, know each other and share with one another,” thereby removing or at least reducing prejudice and indifference (Eilers 2007:113). In particular, FEISA explains the theological basis for this outreach to migrants of other religions as follows:

Making the migrants/refugees the target of our pastoral care is our concrete way of witnessing to the people of Asia. Being a ‘little flock’ in the midst of other ancient religions/beliefs, the Asian Church cannot remain “inward looking”. The Good News is not only to be preached but it is to be lived/practised in concrete day-to-day circumstances of many faiths. Thus, efforts to provide pastoral care to migrants have to include inter-religious dimensions. The Church can and should take the initiative. By doing so, we are witnessing to the mission of Christ through our actions (Eilers 2007:122–123).

Hence, for FEISA V, “interreligious dialogue is imperative” and integral to the Asian Church’s theology and praxis of migration: the Asian Church “dialogues with all regardless of creed, nationality, race, political stance, or other discriminatory factors especially undocumented or documented status of migrant workers” (Eilers 2007:125).

But FEISA V goes one step further to insist that in addressing the needs of migrant, the Asian church “must work together with people of other faiths or none,” joining with all people of good will to respond to other sisters and brothers affirming their full humanity and the inalienable rights that arise from their humanity (Eilers 2007:118). Further, it points out that migration facilitates interreligious interactions and dialogue. This applies to Christians migrating to

non-Christian countries, as well as non-Christian migrants coming into contact with Asian Christians. In the first instance, FEISA V brings up Christians who migrate to non-Christian countries, pointing out that they can be “living witnesses of Christ through Christian love of the members for one another and for the migrant, both Christian and non-Christian” (Eilers 2007:113). In particular, FEISA V encourage these Christian migrants “to invite their friends of other religions to the church where they may receive a warm reception” (Eilers 2007:120). In the second instance, FEISA V states that the Asian Church “can and should take the initiative of providing pastoral care to migrants with inter-religious dimensions” (Eilers 2007:129), because it should not only “see and understand the dignity of other faiths,” but also receive and assist these migrants in their moment of greatest need, taking the initiative to reach out and visit them because as non-Catholics, they “may not have the courage to visit Catholic churches” (Eilers 2007:119). In addition to meeting their basic needs, FEISA V suggests that local parishes could offer space and hospitality to these migrants who “need a place where they can gather together for prayers or to have their religious celebrations or just for a friendly gathering among themselves” (Eilers 2007:120, cf. 130).

Moreover, FEISA V emphasizes the need to give special attention to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) as an outgrowth of the Church’s ministry to the poor, oppressed and marginalized (Eilers 2007:114). Specifically, FEISA insists that the Asian Church needs to include ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in its outreach work with refugees because the Church

is most critical in this region where we belong to the minority and we work in the midst of rich, diverse, and important religious and cultural traditions. The spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue should thus permeate our programming processes. While our faith spurs us to serve the refugees it does not become the criteria for refugees to avail themselves of our services (Eilers 2007:117).

Finally, in recognition of the fact that highly skilled pastoral workers are needed to engage with migrants in their fullness of their cultures, religions, and poverty, FEISA V recommends:

To fully understand the needs of the migrants, the Church must equip herself with the knowledge and skills required for this minority. These include knowledge of the languages of migrants, the provision of possibilities for migrants to express their faith with their language and culture, if necessary, of missionaries capable to be with migrants or mediators of faith and cultural dialogue (Eilers 2007:130).

## Conclusion

Any analysis of the FABC's theology of migration must begin with the fact that the FABC sees the phenomenon of ongoing migration in Asia within the broader framework of migration as "part and parcel of human civilization" (Eilers 2007:112) and "a natural phenomenon" that arises from "the inherent right of people to move" (Eilers 2007:114). At the same time, the FABC also acknowledges that not all migrations are freely and voluntarily undertaken. It insists that the Asian Church has to respond to the dilemma of Asians who migrate in a quest to ensure their survival because of physical or economic threats (Eilers 2007:114).

As far as the FABC is concerned, migration cannot be separated from the complex interplay of social, economic, class, religious, and political factors that interact to displace people from their homelands. Whether voluntary or forced, migration reveals the vulnerability, insecurity, uncertainty, and humiliation of millions of Asians who find themselves on the move, either internally or beyond their national borders, as they deal with survival, uprootedness, and exploitation in their quest for a better life for themselves and their families. While it is true that the FABC did not deal directly with the issue of migration in the first decade of its existence and initially focused on the practical economic and personal needs of migrants in its early pronouncements, nevertheless the FABC has come a long way since then to articulate a comprehensive theology of migration that is rooted in its broader threefold theological vision of commitment and service to life, triple dialogue with Asian cultures, religions and the poor, and with the aim of advancing the Reign of God in Asia.

The starting point of the FABC's theology of migration is its ecclesiological (Tan 2005:87–89) and missiological (Tan 2004:77–81) vision of bringing about the Good News of the Reign of God in Asia. It is rooted in a "commitment and service to life" that has been the foundation and the hallmark of the FABC's theology since its articulation at the First FABC International Theological Colloquium (1994) and subsequently confirmed and expanded by the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC (Tan 2000:547–550, 2005:77–79). For the FABC, its commitment and service to life also extends to migrants who often face discrimination, exploitation, persecution, or human rights abuses. As far as the FABC is concerned, migrants are not objects for conversion or proselytization, but rather opportunities for the Asian Church to reach out to and walk together in solidarity. FEISA V summarizes it well when it states that migration "offers the Church all over the world an opportunity to reach out to the ones most

discriminated by society today. Being in solidarity with them, offers us the opportunity to offer the Good News of the Gospel to them as individuals and as a community” (Eilers 2007:128). In the same vein, FABC VI states:

Our solidarity requires a resolve *to work with our Asian sisters and brothers in liberating our societies from whatever oppresses and degrades human life and creation, most especially from sin. . . .* Serving life demands communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life in the way of Jesus’ solidarity with humanity. With our Asian sisters and brothers, we will strive to foster communion among Asian peoples who are threatened by glaring economic, social, and political imbalances. With them we will explore ways of utilizing the gifts of our diverse religions, cultures, and languages to achieve a richer and deeper Asian unity. We build bridges of solidarity and reconciliation with peoples of other faiths and will join hands with everyone in Asia in forming a true community of creation (FABC VI, art. 14.2, in Eilers 1997:8, *emphasis added*).

In practical terms, the FABC’s theology of migration begins with social analysis (Tan 2000: 550–555) that questions the poverty, economic marginalization, racial, political and religious tensions, environmental degradation, as well as many Asian nations’ heavy dependence on the remittances of their nationals as economic migrants, which lie at the heart of the ever growing numbers of migrants, whether they are voluntarily or forcibly displaced (see FABC VI, art. 15.5, in Eilers 1997:11 and the comprehensive discussion of FEISA V in Eilers 2007:93). More specifically, FEISA V is adamant in its theology of migration that the Asian Church should defend the human dignity and rights of migrants regardless of race, religion, or legal status as part of its wider stance of advocating for the rights and aspirations of the poor and marginalized (Eilers 2007:128–129). In particular, the FABC’s insistence on defending the rights of the undocumented echoes the position adopted by Pope John Paul II in his message for World Migration Day, 1996, when he spoke of the need for the Church to defend the rights of the undocumented migrants:

In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants should be recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters. . . . Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble. For Christians, the migrant is not merely an individual to be respected in accordance with the norms established by law, but a person whose presence challenges them and whose needs become an obligation for their responsibility. “What have you done to your brother?” (cf. Gn 4:9). The answer should not be limited to what is imposed by law, but should be made in the manner of solidarity (John Paul II 1996).

However, the FABC goes beyond mere social analysis of the dehumanizing conditions that are endured by migrants when it seeks to undergird its migration theology within its broader theological threefold dialogue with the quintessentially Asian realities of diverse cultures, religions, and the immense poverty. This can be seen in FEISA V's call on local churches to broaden their outreach by engaging with non-Christian migrants within the integrity of their own cultures and religions, providing interreligious pastoral care and assisting them with their all their needs, including their practice of their own religious faiths. Indeed, the FABC is convinced that its theology of migration needs to pay close attention to the intercultural and interreligious implications of migration and integrate the intercultural and interreligious dimensions in its pastoral care of migrants. It insists that the "Good News is not only to be preached but it is to be lived and practised in concrete day-to-day circumstances among people of many faiths" (Eilers 2007:130). Clearly the call for pastoral workers to learn the languages, cultures and traditions of these non-Christian migrants so as to be able to assist these migrants retain and express their own languages, cultures and religious faiths is a clear and unequivocal repudiation of the temptation to proselyte among non-Christian migrants in their most vulnerable state.

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