

Lay People in the Asian Church: A Study of John Paul II's Theology of the Laity in *Ecclesia in Asia* with Reference to the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

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Abstract: *Examining John Paul II's theology of the laity in his Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia, this essay argues that its core is the logic of faith as gift and evangelisation as task. Furthermore, the "witness of life" is the Pope's comprehensive concept describing and prescribing the identity and role of lay people in Asia. Concretely expressing the integration of faith, proclamation, and Christian living, this notion succinctly summarises the document's theology of the laity. This paper proposes a new way of interpreting John Paul II's theology of mission, one that is based on a distinction between his theological firmness regarding the principle of proclamation and his pastoral flexibility regarding the triple dialogue with the cultures, religions and poor of Asia. This essay concludes that there is a substantial convergence between the Pope and the Asian bishops regarding the theology of the laity.*

Key Words: laity – theology; John Paul II; *Ecclesia in Asia*; Catholic Church in Asia; Synod of Asian bishops; evangelisation; dialogue

In his assessment of John Paul II's achievements in the twilight of his long pontificate Jewish human rights activist Elie Wiesel, who was receiver of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, states that if Pope John XXIII had opened the windows of the Church by his vision and actions, then John Paul II opened its doors.¹ Indeed, John Paul II's journeys to all parts of the world highlighted the Catholic presence as never before.² During those pilgrimages the pontiff never failed to meet with lay people or to discuss the laity question to emphasise their role and responsibility. Addressing the Italian Episcopal Conference in May 1985 he recalled the importance that Vatican II had placed on the laity's contribution to the mission of the Church in the world and gave two reasons for choosing the vocation and the mission of the laity as the topic of the 1987 Ordinary Synod of Bishops, the first

¹ Elie Wiesel, "Pope John Paul II: Pointing the Way to Reconciliation," *Time* (26 April 2004): 67.

² The Pontiff made 104 overseas trips and 146 pastoral visits inside Italy, and in Rome, he visited 317 of the 333 parishes. See Gianni Colzani, "Between Wojtyla and Ratzinger," *Theology Digest* 52.3 (Fall 2005): 217. For F. Houtart, becoming Pope in 1978, in the difficult post-Vatican II period, John Paul II's twin objective was "to restore a church shaken by the aftermath of the Council and to reinforce its presence in society." See Colzani, "Between Wojtyla and Ratzinger," 219. Australian Prime Minister John Howard describes Pope John Paul II as "a man of enormous courage and dignity whose words of faith and hope inspired millions behind the Iron Curtain to dream again of a Europe whole and free": "A Tribute to *Quadrant*," *Quadrant* (November 2006): 23.

being “the increased awareness of the role that the laity play in the work of salvation,” and the second the need to respond to the suggestion of many bishops throughout the world.³ Fifteen months after the conclusion of this Synod, John Paul II promulgated the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*.⁴ He would often revisit and deepen this topic in his vast corpus of writings and addresses in subsequent years up until his final pilgrimage on 2nd April 2005. One of the significant writings during this period is *Ecclesia in Asia*,⁵ the post-synodal document that he promulgated in 1999, one year after the close of the Synod for Asia. In this *magna carta* for the people of God in Asia, he discusses *inter alia* the role of lay people within the context of evangelisation, a mission that he considers as “an absolute priority”⁶ for the Asian Church.

The first section of this essay provides an overview of the contents and the structure of *Ecclesia in Asia*. The second examines John Paul II’s theology of the laity as proposed in this document with reference to his other writings and addresses.⁷ The final section compares the theologies of the laity of John Paul II and the Catholic bishops of Asia. This essay argues that it is the logic of faith as gift and evangelisation as task that underlines and unifies the entire post-synodal document, which proceeds from a Christological and Pneumatological perspective to interpret the mission of the Asian Church, in which lay people fully participate. It also contends that “witness of life” is a comprehensive concept that the Pope employs to describe and prescribe the identity and role of lay people in Asia. As a concrete expression of the integration of faith, proclamation, and Christian living, it occupies a central place in *Ecclesia in Asia* and is a succinct summary of its theology of the laity. The paper proposes a new approach to interpreting John Paul II’s theology of evangelisation, one that is based on a basic distinction between the theological firmness (*fortiter*) with which he imposes compliance with the doctrine of proclamation and the pastoral flexibility (*suaviter*) that he encourages in the engagement in the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. The essay concludes that, except for some minor difference in the interpretation of the vocation and mission of lay people in the Asian Church, there is a substantial convergence between the theologies of the laity in *Ecclesia in Asia* and the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences.⁸

³ John Paul II, “Propose Suitable Pastoral Lines in the Light of Loreto Discourse,” Address to the Italian Episcopal Conference, *L’Osservatore Romano* (30 September 1985): 9.

⁴ John Paul II, “*Christifideles Laici*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World,” *Origins* 18.35 (9 February 1989): 561, 563-595. Henceforth, in footnotes the full title will be abbreviated to *Christifideles Laici* followed by numbers.

⁵ John Paul II, “*Ecclesia in Asia*,” *Origins* 29.23 (18 November 1999): 357, 359-84. Hereafter, only the title and numbers will be used in footnotes.

⁶ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §2.

⁷ While *Christifideles Laici* is the primary source of the Pope’s theology of the laity, his view on the role of the laity can also be gathered from the catechetical lectures he gave in general audiences between 27 October 1993 and 21 September 1994. See *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community: A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline, 1998): 409-527.

⁸ In this essay we employ the term “the Asian bishops” or “the bishops of Asia” to refer to the Catholic bishops of Episcopal Conferences in East Asia that are members of the FABC. The members of the FABC are the Bishops’ Conferences in South, Southeast, East and Central Asia. All official FABC documents issued from 1970 to 2001 have been published in a three-volume collection: G.B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992); Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference, Documents from 1992 to 1996*, vol. 2 (Quezon City: Claretian, 1997); Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Documents from 1997 to 2001*, vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002). These volumes will be cited as FAPA Vol. 1, FAPA Vol. 2, and FAPA Vol. 3 with the seven FABC Plenary Assemblies being referred to as FABC I, II, III, IV, V, VI, and VII. FABC’s offices and

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS AND THE STRUCTURE OF *ECCLESIA IN ASIA*

Unlike *Christifideles Laici*, which deals with a single topic, the vocation and mission of the laity, and has as audience the entire universal Church, *Ecclesia in Asia* discusses many theological themes but addresses one single constituency, the local Church in Asia.⁹ This choice of coverage suggests that the latter document has a broader theological scope and a more localised approach than the former. This particular orientation is underscored by the post-synodal document's Latin title, taken from its opening words, which translates literally as the "Church in Asia." Therefore, to understand its theology of the laity one has to analyse the document with a double reference to its major themes and the particular situations in Asia. Within this contextual framework, this section provides a brief exposition of the themes and the structure of *Ecclesia in Asia*.

Ecclesia in Asia is organised into seven chapters flanked by an introduction and a conclusion. It focuses on the new evangelisation,¹⁰ the main theme of John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, which details a programme for the Church to welcome the Third Millennium of Christianity.¹¹ Preparing for the year 2000, he declared, was "a hermeneutical key" of his pontificate.¹² It aims to increase "sensitivity to all that the Spirit is saying" to the Churches in Asia, as well as "to individuals through charisms meant to serve the whole community."¹³ The Pope determined that the objective of the third millennium jubilee, the overall context for *Ecclesia in Asia*, is "the strengthening of faith and of the witness of Christians."¹⁴ This jubilee includes the convening of five continental Synods to discuss the challenges of evangelisation according to the needs and situation of each continent.¹⁵ The theme he chose for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, commonly referred to as the Asian Synod,¹⁶ was "Jesus Christ the Savior and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia: 'That they may have Life and have it Abundantly' (Jn 10:10)."¹⁷ In the introduction to the post-synodal document he describes the Asian Synod

institutes, cited in this paper, will be abbreviated as follows: Office of Evangelization (OE), Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA), and Bishops' Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs (BIRA).

⁹ In this paper we employ interchangeably the following terms, in singular or plural form: "the Church in Asia" or "the Asian Church."

¹⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §29. John Paul II mentioned the term "new evangelization" for the first time on 9 March 1983 in his address to the Latin American Bishops at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in the context of the 500th anniversary in 1992 of the first evangelisation of the Americas. See "Apostolic Letter to Latin American Religious on the Occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World," *Origins* 20.13 (6 September 1990) 209, and endnote 1 on page 216.

¹¹ John Paul II, "*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*," *Origins* 24.24 (24 November 1994): 401, 403-16.

¹² John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, §23. According to Peter C. Phan, "this hermeneutical key, which is eschatology, is deeply shaped by the Trinitarian mystery" ("God in the World: A Trinitarian Triptych," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years* [Detroit: Gale Group in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2001] 33).

¹³ John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, §23, *Origins* 24.24 (24 November 1994): 408.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, §42.

¹⁵ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §2. Avery Dulles notes that the Synod for Asia deals mainly with "the challenges to evangelization offered by the encounter with the local cultures and with world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism": "John Paul II and the Advent of the New Millennium," *America* (9 December 1995): 14.

¹⁶ Thomas Menampampil contends that "historically speaking, the Asian Synod was the most important ecclesial event for Asia from the time of the great Councils (Nicaea, Ephesus, Chalcedon)": "Asia Through Asian Eyes," in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian, 2002): 30.

¹⁷ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §2.

as “a moment of grace,” “a celebratory remembering of the Asian roots of Christianity,” and “an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour.”¹⁸

He repeats what he declared in an address to the bishops of Asia at the 10th World Youth Day in Manila, that evangelisation must be their “absolute priority,” and evangelisation is “the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹ In the conclusion, he returns to this theme of gratitude and encouragement, entrusting the Church in Asia to Mary, the mother of Christ, and encouraging all Asian Christians to fulfil their mission of love and service, and share with the peoples of Asia “the immense gift” that they have received: “the love of Jesus the Savior.”²⁰

The seven chapters and fifty-one articles of *Ecclesia in Asia* can be grouped into three parts. Part 1 (chapter 1) provides an analysis of the Asian context. In Part 2, consisted of chapters 2 and 3, the Pope reflects on Jesus Christ as “a Gift for Asia” and the Holy Spirit as “Lord and Giver of Life.” Part 3, which comprises the last four chapters, discusses the evangelising duty of all members of the Church as witnesses to the Gospel (chapter 7) through proclamation and inculturation (chapter 4), communion and dialogue for mission (chapter 5), and the service of human promotion (chapter 6). This grouping was likely what John Paul II had in mind when he composed the post-synodal document. First, it displays an organising structure based on the “See, Judge, Act” process, a contextual methodology adopted by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne movement, and one that was familiar to the Pope,²¹ with Part 1 corresponding to the “See” phase, Part 2, its doctrinal component, to the “Judge” phase, and Part 3, its pastoral and practical component, to the “Act” phase. Second, it is consistent with the three-fold emphasis of *Ecclesia in Asia*, which devotes chapter 4 to proclamation, and inculturation or dialogue with the cultures, chapter 5 to dialogue with other Christian Churches and other religions on the basis of the Church as communion and mission, and chapter 6 to human promotion and dialogue with the people of Asia, especially the poor.

Our grouping differs from what was proposed by James Kroeger, who structured the post-synodal document along three “underlying thematics.”²² His first section, consisting of chapter 1, is “an exploration of the concrete situation of contemporary Asia.”²³ His second section, comprising chapters 2, 3, and 4, deals with the “Theological-Doctrinal Aspects of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit,” and his third section, composed of the last three chapters, discusses “The Church’s Mission of Love and Service in Asia.”²⁴ In his view, chapters 2, 3 and 4 together “describe a type of ‘doctrinal’ orientation to the Church’s Asian mission.”²⁵ The strength of this assertion is that it highlights the linkage between chapter 2 “Jesus the Saviour: A Gift to Asia” and chapter 4 “Jesus the Saviour: Proclaiming

¹⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§3-4.

¹⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §2.

²⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§50-51.

²¹ During the summer vacation in 1947, Father Wojtyla visited France and Belgium where he studied movements such as the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (Young Christian Workers) and met with its founder, Canon Joseph Cardijn. See Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 4, 103, 130.

²² James H. Kroeger, “Continuing Pentecost in Asia: Introducing *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 71.

²³ Kroeger, “Continuing Pentecost in Asia,” 71.

²⁴ Kroeger, “Continuing Pentecost in Asia,” 71.

²⁵ Kroeger, “Continuing Pentecost in Asia,” 72.

the Gift”, an implicit allusion to the Pope’s gift/task idea, a logic that we contend is central to *Ecclesia in Asia*. However, a close reading of these chapters suggests that chapters 2 and 3 offer a set of theological principles based on the Pope’s articulation of a Christology and a Pneumatology for Asia, and chapter 4 deals less with the doctrinal aspects of Christ and much more with the primacy of proclamation and the necessity of inculturation, an endeavour to make the Gospel more intelligible and acceptable to Asian peoples. Therefore, we argue that it is more fruitful to group chapter 4 with chapters 5, 6, and 7 as together they constitute the pastoral vision of the Pope for Asia, and reflect better his emphasis on the Church’s mission of love and service as proclamation and triple dialogue, with chapter 7 dealing specifically with Christians as witnesses to, and agents of, the Gospel. This grouping is also aligned with the triple dialogue vision of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, whose members constituted the majority of the Synod participants.²⁶ Indeed, in their propositions to the Pope “for his use in composing his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation,”²⁷ the Synod Fathers affirmed that “the threefold dialogue is one integral movement of the Christian’s evangelising mission.”²⁸ They stated explicitly in their final message to the people of God that “the Church in Asia is called upon to enter a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor.”²⁹ This message also acknowledges an increasingly important role of the laity in the mission of the Church, and considers the 21st century as “the Age of the Laity.”³⁰ This view is reinforced in the closing speech by Cardinal Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja of Indonesia, which emphasises the role of lay people in the Church’s mission *ad extra*, and insists that their “empowerment and ongoing formation” is essential.³¹ Revisiting the overall theme of the Synod for Asia, he declares that “‘being Church in Asia’ today means ‘participating in the mission of Christ the Savior, in rendering his redemptive love and service in Asia,’” so that Asian peoples can more fully achieve their integral human development and “‘that they may have life and have it abundantly.’”³² These statements effectively summarise the major themes and the structure of *Ecclesia in Asia*, and at the same time highlight the critical role of lay people in the mission of the Church in Asia, the subject of our investigation in the next section.

2. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY IN *ECCLESIA IN ASIA*

Of the many topics and ideas presented in *Ecclesia in Asia*, the concept of “gift” stands out as one that occupies a central place in the Apostolic Exhortation. This observation is borne out by an examination of chapters 2 and 3 that provide the document’s doctrinal framework, and chapter 4 that discusses the primacy of proclamation of Jesus the Saviour as the gift to Asia and the challenge of inculturation. In these chapters, the concept of “gift”

²⁶ The Synod for Asia was also attended by a small number of representatives from the Middle-East countries.

²⁷ Peter C. Phan notes that these propositions or recommendations “do not have a deliberative but only a consultative force,” and *Ecclesia in Asia* has included all but eight of the fifty-nine propositions: “Editor’s Notes,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 140.

²⁸ Synod of Bishops, “The Synod’s Propositions,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 140-65.

²⁹ Synod of Bishops, “Message to the People of God From the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia,” *Origins* 28.2 (28 May 1998): 20.

³⁰ Synod of Bishops, “Message to the People of God,” 20.

³¹ Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja, “A Church With a Truly Asian Face,” *Origins* 28.2 (28 May 1998): 26.

³² Darmaatmadja, “A Church With a Truly Asian Face,” 26.

is intimately linked to the notion of faith. As Jesus himself is the “gift of faith,”³³ it is a task for all Christians, including the laity, to proclaim and share this gift. This gift/task motif (neatly expressed in German as *die Gabe und die Aufgabe*) runs through the whole post-synodal document.³⁴ It is stated with crystal clarity in the first paragraph (no. 1), forcefully at the beginning of chapters 2 and 4 (nos. 10 and 19 respectively), and emphatically as a departing thought toward the end of the post-synodal document (no. 50). For John Paul II, “the Good News of Jesus Christ” is the “gift of all gifts,” and “the Church’s faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared.”³⁵ It is, writes the Pope, “the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia.”³⁶ Therefore, “sharing the truth of Jesus with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith,” and the Church in Asia “cannot cease to proclaim” this “unique gift of faith” which she has received for the good of all.³⁷ In his view, “what distinguishes the Church from other religious communities is her faith in Jesus Christ; and she cannot keep this precious light of faith under a bushel.”³⁸ Her mission, he insists, is “to share that light with everyone.”³⁹ The Pope emphasises this point again at the conclusion of the Apostolic Exhortation, declaring that the Church’s only joy is to share with Asian peoples “the immense gift which she has received – the love of Jesus the Savior.”⁴⁰ These statements and disquisitions, together with the repeated use of the verb “to share” and its grammatical variants, give rise to our first and overall observation that it is the dynamics of faith as gift and evangelisation as task that underlines and unifies the entire Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*.

By emphasising that Jesus is the gift of faith, the post-synodal document retrieves and expands the Christological insights of *Lumen Gentium* and *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), the Pope’s very first encyclical and also “the programmatic document” of his entire pontificate.⁴¹ By stressing that this gift must be shared, it captures and contextualises the missionary focus of the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), a document that “represents a new synthesis of the Church’s teaching about evangelization in the contemporary world,”⁴² and at the same time, articulates his pastoral vision for the remaining fifteen years of his public life. These Christological and missionary concerns are the theological foundation of his gift/task logic and an expression of his contextual approach to the Church in Asia. They reveal that, more than being a philosopher,⁴³ a poet,⁴⁴ a playwright,⁴⁵ and a theologian,⁴⁶ John Paul II is first and foremost a Christian

³³ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§4, 10; see also the headings of chapters 2 and 4.

³⁴ See, for instance, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§1, 10, 12, 19, 20, 31, 35, and 50.

³⁵ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§19, 10.

³⁶ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §10.

³⁷ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§10, 1.

³⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §10.

³⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §10.

⁴⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §50.

⁴¹ Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church actually starts with a Christological affirmation that “Christ is the light of humanity.” LG §1; Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 10.

⁴² John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), 114.

⁴³ In their cover story on John Paul II as *Time*’s 1994 Man of the Year, the authors note that “The Pope’s reading is eclectic: philosophy, history, sociology – all in the original languages,” and that “Ratzinger is a theologian and John Paul is a philosopher”: Greg Burke, Thomas Sancton and Wilton Wynn, “Lives of the Pope,” *Time* (26 December 1994-2 January 1995): 34).

⁴⁴ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 117-9.

⁴⁵ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 140.

pastor, intent on being faithful to Jesus, the embodiment of the Christian message and tradition, and at the same time, one who is deeply concerned about the imperative of evangelising mission, the duty to share Jesus the gift with all peoples of Asia in their own cultural and social environment. Therefore, to fully appreciate the many theological issues raised in *Ecclesia in Asia*, in particular those relating to the vocation and mission of the laity, one has to explore them with a double reference to the gift/task framework, and the Christological and missionary orientation.

In this post-synodal document, the Pope tends to employ interchangeably the terms “the Church in Asia,” “Christians,” “the faithful,” “all the baptised,” “Asian Christians,” “Disciples of Christ,” “Christian community,” “Catholic community,” and “the Church” to mean the “people of God” in Asia.⁴⁷ These terms obviously include lay people who constitute ninety-nine per cent of the Church’s membership,⁴⁸ and who are the audience that the Pope intended to entrust in a special way the fruits of the Synod for Asia.⁴⁹ Therefore, while the identity of lay people and their specific role are discussed in greater detail in only three sections of the document,⁵⁰ the mission and ministry that he assigns to all “Asian Christians” will *ipso facto* apply to the laity. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, this mission is twofold: proclamation of Jesus as Lord, and triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor, and its agents are the entire “witnessing Church,” including the clergy, the religious, and the laity, in particular, the family and young people.⁵¹ By accenting the dual aspect of mission, the Pope has reiterated his previous teachings in chapter 5 of *Redemptoris Missio*. In this encyclical on missionary activity, he explains that “mission is a single but complex reality” which develops in “a variety of ways,” encompassing witness as the first form of evangelisation, proclamation, “the permanent priority of mission,” which leads to conversion, baptism, and establishment of local Churches, inculturation of the Gospel in different cultures, interreligious dialogue, and promotion of integral development and liberation by forming consciences.⁵² The remarkable alignment between these two papal documents demonstrates that John Paul II has been quite consistent in his view on the meaning, purpose, and importance of the evangelising mission as both proclamation and triple dialogue. What is innovative in the latter document is his constant juxtaposition of these elements of mission to the gift/task idea, a logic that enables him to express a profound gratitude for the grace that has been bestowed on the Church in Asia, and one that heightens his sense of urgency for the missionary task at hand. En route, he opens up a window into his understanding of how God’s marvellous plan unfolds in Asia where the God of salvation has chosen to initiate his saving plan, and puts in context his

⁴⁶ According to Peter Hebblethwaite, “Cardinal Wojtyla did not consider himself to be a professional theologian. His real academic work was in ethical philosophy.” See *The New Inquisition: Schillebeeckx and Küng* (London: Collins, 1980) 110; Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1999), 1-17.

⁴⁷ See respectively, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§1-4, 9-10, 18-20, 22, 25, 32, 34, 36, 48, 50; 23, 24, 30-32, 34, 40-42; 32, 35, 45; 43; 51; 50; 23; 34; 2, 10, 20, 23, 24, 29, 32, 34-39, 42; 25, 31, 33, 42.

⁴⁸ Joseph A. Komonchak, “Christians Must Make a Difference,” *The Tablet* (28 September 2002): 4.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, “Finding the Light,” in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 2002) 59; *Ecclesia in Asia*, §22.

⁵⁰ The titles of §§45, 46, and 47 are respectively “The Laity,” “The Family,” and “Young People.”

⁵¹ See respectively, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§19, 20, 23; 21-22; 29-31; 34-38; 42.

⁵² See respectively, *Redemptoris Missio*, §§41; 42-3; 44; 44-9; 52-4; 55-7; 58-9.

fervent prayer that the third millennium will be a *kairos* for “a great harvest of faith to be reaped in the vast and vital continent.”⁵³

John Paul II often reiterated the gift/task logic in his speeches to and about the laity throughout his pontificate. In 1980, in a homily delivered in Accra, Ghana, he declared that the laity and all Christians have “a unique opportunity and crucial responsibility” to witness to the “the gift of faith, the tremendous privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord,” which is also the greatest treasure and the greatest of all resources entrusted to them.⁵⁴ Speaking with the Canadian laity in 1984 he reminded them of “the general call to the apostolate which all Christians have received,” and their “specific task of renewing the temporal order by permeating it with the spirit of the Gospel.”⁵⁵ In a 1991 talk with Polish lay people, he encouraged them “to learn to recognize the gifts” they have received “in order to pass them on to others and in order to strive for them.”⁵⁶ A couple of years later, reflecting on the topic of the possible participation of lay people in certain aspects of the ordained ministries he insisted that “every office, gift and task should be respected and put to good use.”⁵⁷

The gift/task principle is also a recurrent idea in his addresses on the laity given in general audiences between 27 October 1993 and 21 September 1994.⁵⁸ In an address on Jesus’ earthly life as a model for lay people, he explained that “the call of the laity involves their sharing in the Church’s life and, consequently, an intimate communion with Christ’s very life. It is a divine gift and, at the same time, it has a correspondent duty.”⁵⁹ Recalling *Lumen Gentium* (no. 36) and *Christifideles Laici* (no. 14) he affirmed that “living in the truth received from Christ and working to spread it in the world is thus a task and duty of all Church’s members, including the laity.”⁶⁰ Following the teachings of *Christifideles Laici* (no. 24) and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (no. 3) that charisms should be received in gratitude, and that each believer has the right and duty to use charisms, he emphasised that “this right is based on the Spirit’s gift and the Church’s validation. It is a duty stemming from the very fact of the gift received, which creates a responsibility and demands a commitment.”⁶¹ His predilection for the idea of gift extends also to his reflection on lay people and human life. For him, “The presence of children in the Church” is a gift,⁶² “Old age is a gift,”⁶³ and “Life is always a gift.”⁶⁴ Ten years later, pondering on the linkage between of holiness and credibility of proclamation, he declared that “holiness is not only a gift. It is also a task intrinsic and essential to discipleship, which shapes the whole of Christian life.”⁶⁵

⁵³ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §1.

⁵⁴ John Paul II, “The Role of the Laity in Africa,” *Origins* 10 (1980): 47.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, “The Laity’s Call to Serve,” *Origins* 14:16 (4 October 1984) 255.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, “Laity and Necessary Church Renewal in Poland,” *Origins* 21:6 (20 June 1991): 97.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, “Do Laity Share in the Priest’s Pastoral Ministry?” *Origins* 24:3 (2 June 1994) 41.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998), 409-527.

⁵⁹ General audience of 10 November 1993, in John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community: A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998), 418.

⁶⁰ General audience of 9 February 1994, John Paul II, *The Church*, 438.

⁶¹ General audience of 9 March 1994, John Paul II, *The Church*, 449.

⁶² General audience of 17 August 1994, John Paul II, *The Church*, 510.

⁶³ General audience of 7 September 1994, John Paul II, *The Church*, 521.

⁶⁴ John Paul II, *The Church*, 521.

⁶⁵ John Paul II, “Holiness and the Credibility of the Church’s Proclamation: ‘Ad Limina’ Address to Bishops From California, Nevada and Hawaii,” *Origins* 34:3 (3 June 2004): 41.

These select quotations, taken from the speeches delivered over a period of two decades, show that by connecting the idea of faith as gift and evangelisation as task in *Ecclesia in Asia*, John Paul II has consistently applied a logic that had been central to his thinking. Quoting his own writings from a section of *Redemptoris Missio* that deals with the mission *ad gentes* and the gift of faith,⁶⁶ he warns that the Church and all its members “may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God’s bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind.”⁶⁷ He goes on to affirm that people “who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their obligation of *bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life* as a service to their brothers and sisters, as a fitting response to God” (italics in the original).⁶⁸ Here, for the first time in the Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope introduces the term “witness” in conjunction with the themes of faith and Christian life in the context of the gift/task framework, and determines that witnessing to the gift of faith is the task of all Christians.

Indeed, like the gift/task idea, “witness” is one of the most striking and recurrent concepts in *Ecclesia in Asia*.⁶⁹ In the section devoted to the laity, where the terms “missionaries,” “evangelisers,” “witnesses to Christ,” and “witnesses to the Gospel” are used interchangeably to describe their identity and vocation, John Paul II asserts that their proper role in the life and the mission of the Church consists in being “witnesses to Christ wherever they may find themselves.”⁷⁰ Indeed, by baptism and confirmation, lay people are called to be missionaries in the world “to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁷¹ In addition to linking these concepts of witness and mission to the sacraments of initiation and the duty of proclamation, the Pope singles out dialogue with the poor (liberation and human development) as a unique role of lay people in “rooting out injustice and oppression” by “witnessing to the Gospel in every area of life in society.”⁷² Our second observation is that the term “witness” or its various usages such as “witnessing,” “witnessing to the Gospel,” “witnesses to Christ,” and “witness of life” is a comprehensive concept that John Paul II employs to describe the identity and prescribe the role of the laity in Asia. Explained as a concrete expression of the integration of faith and daily living, it is closely connected to his conception of lay people as missionaries and witnesses to Christ.⁷³ Equated to Christian life and proclamation,⁷⁴ it explicates his insistence on the proclamation of Jesus as the unique and universal saviour. Prescribed as the primary mode of evangelisation,⁷⁵ it is tightly coupled with the notion of faith and lies at the heart of *Ecclesia in Asia*. As such, it epitomises and summarises the contextual theology of the laity proposed in the Apostolic Exhortation.

In this post-synodal document, John Paul II endorses the recommendations of the Synod Fathers on evangelisation, and concurs that it is “a reality that is both rich and

⁶⁶ John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” §11, *Origins* 20.34 (31 January 1991): 545.

⁶⁷ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §10.

⁶⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §10; see also John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” §11, *Origins* 20.34 (31 January 1991): 546.

⁶⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§10, 17, 18, 23, 41-46, 49.

⁷⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §45.

⁷¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §45.

⁷² *Ecclesia in Asia*, §45.

⁷³ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§45-6, 42.

⁷⁴ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§23, 20.

⁷⁵ Here the Pope reiterates his emphasis in *Redemptoris Missio* (§42) that “the witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission.”

dynamic.”⁷⁶ He proceeds to enumerate its many aspects and elements, starting with the concept of witness, including “witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implementation of the Church, inculturation and integral human promotion.”⁷⁷ As evangelisation is the overall theme of the Asian Synod and also the theological focus of *Ecclesia in Asia*, we argue that this loaded list demonstrates his genuine concerns for the priorities and sensibilities of the Asian bishops. It highlights all major tasks and challenges facing the Church in Asia, including an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ together with a detailed explanation of Christian doctrines and practices (catechesis), the necessity of being incorporated into an ecclesial community via conversion and baptism, the need to establish new communities of faith (implementation of the Church), the triple engagement with the religions (interreligious dialogue), the cultures (inculturation), and the poor of Asia (integral human promotion), and finally, the primacy of leading a life worthy of Jesus Christ and his Gospel (witness).

For John Paul II, “there can be no true proclamation of the Gospel unless Christians also offer the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach.”⁷⁸ Everyone in the Church, he declares, “can and must bear this kind of *witness*,” and “genuine *Christian witness* is needed” today because people place “more trust in *witnesses* than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories,”⁷⁹ especially in Asia, “where people are more persuaded by *holiness of life* than by intellectual argument” (emphasis added).⁸⁰ Here, John Paul II seems to have used the term Christian witness to describe the concept of Christian holiness in the Asian context, a motif that is central to both *Lumen Gentium* and *Christifideles Laici*, and one that has generally been defined in these magisterial documents as the perfection of charity.⁸¹

Elsewhere in the post-synodal document, the Pope emphasises that the credibility of proclamation derives from a living faith and that “Christians who speak of Christ must embody in their lives the message that they proclaim.”⁸² For him, witness and proclamation go hand in hand, and both are animated by faith and inseparable from it. Faith, received as a gift, is the basis of the identity and vocation of Christians, and witnessing to Jesus Christ and proclaiming his Gospel are their task and mission in the Church and in the world of Asia. This faith demands sharing, and this gift entails task. In *Christifideles Laici* the Pope employs the gift/task logic to stress that ecclesial communion is both a gift and a task for lay people.⁸³ In *Ecclesia in Asia*, he contextually expands this logic as a recognition by the entire Church, especially the laity (who), of Jesus Christ the Saviour (why) as the gift that must be shared (what) with other peoples through “the joyful, patient and progressive preaching”⁸⁴ (when) by becoming authentic witnesses of life (how) in the world of Asia (where). The application of the gift/task logic underscores a key idea of *Ecclesia in Asia* that evangelisation is always “an ecclesial task which has to be carried out in communion with the whole community of faith.”⁸⁵ This

⁷⁶ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §23.

⁷⁷ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §23.

⁷⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.

⁷⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42; *Redemptoris Missio*, §42.

⁸⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.

⁸¹ *Lumen Gentium*, §40; *Christifideles Laici*, §16.

⁸² *Ecclesia in Asia*, §23.

⁸³ *Christifideles Laici*, §20.

⁸⁴ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §2.

⁸⁵ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.

emphasis leads to our third observation that for John Paul II the identity, the vocation, and the ministry of lay people are understood only in the context of the Church as a witnessing community of faith, built on the two pillars of communion and mission.

In line with the teachings of Vatican II, John Paul II affirms that “the entire Church is missionary,” and “evangelisation is the duty of the whole People of God.”⁸⁶ Here the Pope repeats what he categorically stated in his 1990 document *Redemptoris Missio*: “I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”⁸⁷ In his view, the Church, “instituted by Christ and made present to the world by the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost” in accordance with the Father’s eternal plan, is the mystery of God’s loving design, made present and active in the community of the baptised Christians.⁸⁸ Therefore, it must be seen as “the privileged place of encounter between God and man,” a place in which God reveals the mystery of his inner life and carries out his plan of salvation for the world, and not merely as “a social organization or agency of human welfare.”⁸⁹ For the Pope, at the heart of the mystery of the Church is the bond of communion which unites Christ to all the baptised.⁹⁰ Through this mystery of communion, Christians are united with God and with one another in the Holy Spirit.⁹¹ From this theological perspective, the Pope insists that the primary purpose of the Church is to be the sacrament of “*the inner union of the human person with God*,” and rooted in the union with God, it is also “*the unity of the human race*” (italics in the original).⁹²

Within this ecclesiological framework, John Paul II makes explicit his view that “whoever enters into communion with the Lord, is expected to bear fruit.”⁹³ He goes on to insist that communion with Jesus is “the indispensable condition for bearing fruit,” because communion with others is “the gift of Christ and his Spirit.”⁹⁴ In this sense, he explains, communion is “both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.”⁹⁵ Therefore, he is resolute in his view that “communion and mission are inseparably connected.”⁹⁶ Here, once again the Pope returns to the gift/task logic, this time considering communion as gift and mission as task, and hence situates the vocation and mission of all Christians, including the laity, within an ecclesiological framework that is built on two basic theological concepts of communion and mission.

Like *Christifideles Laici*, in this papal document John Paul II unveils his understanding of the Church by using the concepts of mystery, community of faith, communion, and mission to explicate the nature and purpose of the Church. But, unlike *Christifideles Laici*, which focuses on the role of the laity from a predominantly Trinitarian and ecclesiological perspective, *Ecclesia in Asia* provides a Christological and

⁸⁶ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.

⁸⁷ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §3; *Origins* 20.34 (31 January 1991): 543.

⁸⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁸⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁹⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁹¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁹² *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁹³ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁹⁴ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁹⁵ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

⁹⁶ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §24.

Pneumatological interpretation of the mission of the entire Church in Asia. Expressing this evangelising mission as proclamation (chapter 4, nos. 19-20, 23), and triple dialogue, namely, inculturation (chapter 4, nos. 21-22), communion and dialogue (chapter 5), and human promotion (chapter 6), often within the gift/task framework, it stresses the distinctive role of lay people, in particular women, the family, and young people, as witnesses to the Gospel in the world of Asia (chapter 7, nos. 45, 46, 47).

Three observations summarise our review of the theology of the laity in *Ecclesia in Asia*. First, by repeatedly applying the idea of faith as gift and evangelisation as task to define and describe the mission of the Church in Asia, John Paul II has effectively used the gift/task logic to unify and underline the entire post-synodal document. This logic is intimately linked to a theological motif expounded in *Christifideles Laici*, which postulates that baptismal identity and dignity of Christians, flowing from their faith in Jesus Christ, are the basis of their vocation and mission. The progression from *Christifideles Laici* to *Ecclesia in Asia* can also be discerned in the Pope's accent on the concept of witness of life as the primary mode of evangelisation for Asian Christians, especially the laity. Equated to proclamation, this comprehensive concept is his preferred *locus* to condense and expand his theology of the laity in the post-synodal document. Finally, by considering that the evangelising mission of the witnessing Church as communion and mission, which is incumbent on all members of the Church, has as its fundamental elements both an explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord, and a triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia, he proves to be a contextual theologian who remains faithful to Vatican II and at the same time is sensitive to the demands of the Church in Asia. Here lies one of John Paul II's most powerful theological syntheses, which addresses a critical issue confronting the Asian Church, namely the relationship between evangelisation and interfaith dialogue.⁹⁷ However, while his view on interreligious dialogue is widely welcome in Asia, his insistence on the need to explicitly proclaim Jesus as the universal and only saviour in the Asian milieu has created upset in some theological quarters. Indeed, this contentious issue has received considerable attention from Catholic theologians,⁹⁸ and generated a vigorous theological debate, which had already begun in

⁹⁷ Michael Barnes notes that "'inter-faith' and 'inter-religious' tend to be used interchangeably; the former has inter-personal, the latter more inter-systemic, connotations": *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 3. Peter C. Phan seems to employ these terms interchangeably as well. See the title of his monumental book, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004). For Michael Amaladoss, "interreligious dialogue is primarily not between religions but between believers": "Rationales for Dialogue Among World Religions," *Origins* 19.35 (1 February 1990): 575.

⁹⁸ See, for instance, Peter C. Phan, "Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 249-61; John Mansford Prior, "Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*," in *The Asian Synod*, 236-248; Luis Antonio Tagle, "The Challenges of Mission in Asia: A View from the Asian Synod," in *The Asian Synod*, 212-21; Michael Amaladoss, "Mission in Asia: A Reflection on *Ecclesia in Asia*," in *The Asian Synod*, 222-35; Edmund Chia, "Of Fork and Spoon or Fingers and Chopsticks: Interreligious Dialogue," in *The Asian Synod*, 273-83; Jacques Dupuis, "FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission in Asia Today," *Vidyajyoti* 56.9 (1992): 449-68. G. Gispert-Sauch, "John Paul II: Christology, Dialogue, Mission," *Jeevadhara* 35.209 (2005): 371-80; Jacob Kavunkal, "Church and Mission in Asia in the Light of *Ecclesia in Asia*: A Critical Study," *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000): 290-9; J. Neuner, "Ecclesia in Asia: Towards a New Theology of Proclamation," *Third Millennium* 3 (2000): 110-16; Jonathan Y. Tan, "From 'Missio ad gentes' to 'Missio inter Gentes'. I: Shaping a New Paradigm for Doing Christian Mission in Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 68.9 (September 2004) 670-86; "From 'Missio ad gentes' to 'Missio inter Gentes', II: Shaping a New Paradigm for Doing Christian Mission in Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 69.1 (January 2005): 27-41.

earnest with the publication of *Proclamation and Dialogue*,⁹⁹ a document jointly prepared by two Roman dicasteries, and further intensified with the release of *Dominus Jesus*, a document produced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁰⁰ Some of these scholars at times prefer to contrast rather than compare the Pope's views with those of the FABC,¹⁰¹ and as a result, have focused more on differences rather than common points between the theologies of evangelising mission according to John Paul II and the Asian bishops. As the whole Church is missionary by nature, and evangelisation is the vocation and mission of all Christians, it is fitting to revisit this debate on evangelisation, proclamation, and dialogue in the next section as a prelude to our comparative assessment of their theologies of the laity.

3. FROM DIVERGENCE TO CONVERGENCE: A COMPARISON OF THE THEOLOGIES OF THE LAITY OF JOHN PAUL II AND THE ASIAN BISHOPS

For John Paul II it is an inescapable responsibility of the Church in Asia to proclaim Jesus as Lord and be actively engaged in the threefold dialogue with the peoples, the cultures, and the religions of the continent. In this section we argue that by advocating the double mission of evangelisation as proclamation and triple dialogue, in particular, interreligious dialogue, John Paul II has adopted a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" approach, and in the process, provides a most balanced synthesis of mission theology for Asia. This theological posture is fundamentally a contextual approach in the sense that it aims to be faithful to the tradition by an emphasis on proclamation, a duty that flows from Christ's own command,¹⁰² hence belonging to the nature and *raison d'être* of the Church, and at the same time, endeavours to be sensitive and adaptive to the situations of Asia by supporting a strategy of triple dialogue in the Asian context. As a methodology that is both theologically firm (*fortiter*) on goals and pastorally flexible (*suaviter*) on means, it provides a plausible explanation to the Pope's theology of evangelisation, one that is built on two pillars of proclamation and triple dialogue. This approach also provides a framework to harmonise the seemingly opposing views of *Ecclesia in Asia* and the statements of the Asian bishops, which have often been brought into relief by scholars who hold strong views on the subject.

To support these arguments our starting point will be two inspiring statements of *Redemptoris Missio*, an encyclical that John Paul II relies heavily to articulate his mission theology in *Ecclesia in Asia*.¹⁰³ In the first statement, the Pope emphasises the need to unite two types of proclamation: "the proclamation of the kingdom of God (the content of Jesus'

⁹⁹ The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," *Origins* 21.8 (4 July 1991): 121, 123-35.

¹⁰⁰ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration 'Dominus Jesus': On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church," *Origins* 30.14 (14 September 2000): 209, 211-224. For a helpful discussion of this document in reference to Vatican II and the FABC, see respectively, Aloysius Pieris, "The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican's *Dominus Jesus*," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38.3 (2001): 207-30, and Edmund Chia, "FABC's 'Response' to *Dominus Jesus*," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38.3 (2001): 231-7.

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, "From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41.1 (2004): 68-101.

¹⁰² *Ecclesia in Asia*, §20; see also Mt 28:18-20, Mk16:15-6, Lk 24:46-8, Jn 14:6, 20:21, and Acts 1:8.

¹⁰³ There are at least 19 direct and indirect references to *Redemptoris Missio* in *Ecclesia in Asia*.

own *kerygma*) and the proclamation of the Christ event (the *kerygma* of the apostles).¹⁰⁴ For him “after the resurrection, the disciples preach the kingdom by proclaiming Jesus crucified and risen from death,” hence, “the two proclamations are complementary; each throws light on the other.”¹⁰⁵ In the second, John Paul II teaches that “the Spirit’s presence and activity,” which are “universal, limited neither by space nor time,” “affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.”¹⁰⁶ In *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope clarifies this doctrine by affirming that “the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from universal salvation of Jesus,” and “the presence of the Spirit in creation and history points to Jesus Christ in whom creation and history are redeemed and fulfilled.”¹⁰⁷ In his view, “the Holy Spirit’s universal presence can never be separated from his activity within the body of Christ, the Church,”¹⁰⁸ and “whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁹ We will conclude that there is more convergence and agreement than divergence and disagreement in the theologies of the laity according to John Paul II and the FABC, and, despite the intense debate on the subject of Christian mission, which has at times verged on a polarisation into evangelisation-as-proclamation and evangelisation-as-triple dialogue, the similitude between their perspectives on evangelisation in Asia and the role of lay people, is more pronounced than their perceived differences. The task of this section is twofold. First, it reviews the state of the question and unfolds John Paul II’s theology of evangelisation with a focus on proclamation and interreligious dialogue and in reference to the statements of the FABC. Secondly, it provides a comparative assessment of their theologies of the laity.

John Paul II’s theology of evangelising mission has often been seen as ambivalent. This ambivalence is due to the fact that, on the one hand, he emphasises the need for respect for what the Spirit does in the histories, cultures, and religions of all peoples. On the other hand, he affirms that Jesus Christ is the only way, truth and life for humankind, and the Church is the ordinary means of salvation.¹¹⁰ In fact, choosing the theme of the Synod, John Paul II wanted the Synod to “illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one mediator between God and man and the sole redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions.”¹¹¹ Critics of his post-synodal document *Ecclesia in Asia* generally concur that the real issue confronting the Church in Asia is not the *who*, *what* or *why* of mission, but *how*.¹¹² Like these Asian theologians, the Pope is also acutely aware of the importance of the *how* of mission. Thus,

¹⁰⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, §16.

¹⁰⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, §16.

¹⁰⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, §28.

¹⁰⁷ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §16.

¹⁰⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §16; *Redemptoris Missio*, §28.

¹⁰⁹ *Redemptoris Missio*, §28; See also *Lumen Gentium*, §16.

¹¹⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §31.

¹¹¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §2.

¹¹² Edmund Chia, “Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*,” *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000): 300-1; J. Neuner, “*Ecclesia in Asia*: Towards a New Theology of Proclamation,” *Third Millennium* 3 (2000): 113; Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41.1 (2004): 81-6; Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002): 255; John Mansford Prior, “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Asian Synod*, 239-41.

he writes, “the great question now facing the Church in Asia is *how* to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely the Good News of Jesus Christ” (italics in the original).¹¹³ In his view, “the new evangelization, as a call to conversion, grace and wisdom, is the only genuine hope for a better world and a brighter future. The question is not whether the Church has something essential to say to the men and women of our time, but *how* she can say it clearly and convincingly” (emphasis added).¹¹⁴ Therefore, what needs to be asked is why the Pope is fully aware of the difficulties facing the Church in Asia, but continues to insist on the need for Asian Christians to explicitly proclaim that Jesus is the universal and only saviour. By focusing mainly on the doctrinal aspects of his theology of evangelisation, Asian theologians have generally assessed the Pope’s view on evangelisation in his capacity as a theologian rather than as a theologian *cum* pastor, and in the process accented the differences rather than the similarities between his theology of evangelisation and that of the FABC. This requires remedy because of the importance of proclamation and dialogue in the Asian context, their profound implications for the Churches in Asia, and their prominence in *Ecclesia in Asia* and the documents of the Asian bishops.

In a brilliant essay on approaches to doing mission in Asia, Jonathan Tan Yun-ka provides a helpful exposition and evaluation of John Paul II’s mission theology in contrast to theologies of the FABC by making a series of observations, which are bolstered by many direct and lengthy quotations from several prominent Catholic theologians who have written extensively on the subject.¹¹⁵ First, the author argues that the focus of *Ecclesia in Asia* is Christocentric with an emphasis on the need “to focus on the verbal, explicit proclamation of the uniqueness and necessity of Christ for the salvation of the world.”¹¹⁶ This focus is different from the approach adopted by the Asian bishops who “are more interested in exploring how Christ’s salvific message relates to the deep soteriological dimensions of Asian cultures and religions.”¹¹⁷ Secondly, while John Paul II teaches that “the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from universal salvation in Jesus,” the FABC concurs with the Pope that “there is only one economy of salvation,” but prefers to adopt a different view in which “Christ is subsumed within the Spirit.”¹¹⁸ Thirdly, the Pope takes “a linear and evolutionary view of salvation history,” and subscribes to a fulfilment theory, which postulates that “other religions are fulfilled in Christianity.”¹¹⁹ Fourthly, the Pope seems to perceive “dialogue as *preparatio evangelica*,

¹¹³ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §19.

¹¹⁴ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §29.

¹¹⁵ Theologians quoted in this paper include Michael Amaladoss, William Burrows, Edmund Chia, Donal Dorr, Jacob Kavunkal, James Kroeger, Josef Neuner, Peter C. Phan, Aloysius Pieris, John Mansford Prior, Aylward Shorter, and Felix Wilfred. It is noteworthy that Tan did not quote Jacques Dupuis, a *cause célèbre* due to a two-year investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for his magisterial work *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Mission in Asia,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:1 (2004) 73.

¹¹⁷ Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 74.

¹¹⁸ See respectively, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §16; Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 77.

¹¹⁹ Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 78-80. For Michael Amaladoss, *Ecclesia in Asia* “operates with a linear view of history of salvation,” which considers Jesus and Christianity “as the fulfillment of the other religions” (“The Image of Jesus in the *Church in Asia*,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37:3 [2000] 236); John Mansford Prior observes that “the theology of religions in *Ecclesia in Asia* follows the fulfilment theory.” See “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 241. The Asian bishops also seem to adopt this theory by affirming that “the Church as the Sacrament of

in the sense that dialogue is linked with proclamation, and should lead to a proclamation of the fullness of salvation alone.”¹²⁰ Fifthly, while recognising “the important role of life-witness” the Pope “does not expand on the life-witness approach,” but prefers “to speak of proclamation with its focus on theory, argument, teaching and confrontation.”¹²¹ In contrast with the “essentialist approach” of John Paul II, which “presupposes an unchanging deposit of truth,” the FABC is more at home with life-witness as “the Asian way of proclaiming the Christian Gospel in Asia.”¹²² Finally, unlike the Asian bishops who adopt “a combined *inductive-deductive* approach,” which starts from “the life experiences of the Asian peoples,” and “working its way back to the Church’s dogmatic and creedal traditions,” John Paul II opts for “a *deductive* method of theology,” which begins “from basic, a priori abstract assertions to conclusion, from general, universal principles to particular situations.”¹²³ Therefore, in contrast to the Pope’s emphasis on proclamation “as the primary task of mission,” which takes precedence over life-witness and dialogue,¹²⁴ the bishops of Asia accent “a threefold dialogue with the life-realities of myriad cultures, religions and economic-political realities,”¹²⁵ and “see dialogue as the only viable means of mission.”¹²⁶

Notwithstanding the merit of, and the profit from, these scholarly labours, John Paul II’s contextual approach to evangelisation in Asia is yet to be plumbed for a more plausible explanation. For John Paul II, the theologian *cum* pastor, “in the light of the economy of salvation, the church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue.”¹²⁷ His explicit instruction to Asian Christians is to “recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ” so that they may be able “to communicate that gift to others through *proclamation* and *dialogue*” (italics in the original).¹²⁸ We argue that this statement, with a deliberate emphasis on the terms proclamation and dialogue, and their listing order, provides a key for understanding the Pope’s mission theology in Asia.

To resolve the vexing issue associated with John Paul II’s insistence that the Church in Asia must proclaim Jesus as the only saviour, Peter C. Phan proceeds from the perspective of preaching and catechesis rather than theology, and notes that “the immediate goal of the proclamation of the gospel is to enable a person to accept Jesus as his or her ‘personal Savior’.”¹²⁹ For him “it is this personal and total commitment of the catechumen to Jesus that is being promoted, not the rejection of the *possible* ways in which God can reach *other* people, a possibility that can no longer be denied after Vatican II. The vital question before all else is not whether and how *other* people can be saved but *how I* can fully enter a personal relationship with God” (emphasis in the original).¹³⁰ S.J Emmanuel, on the other hand, emphasises the communitarian aspect of proclamation

union with God and of the unity of all humankind has the mission to promote in various ways the fulfilment which is God’s will and gift for all persons in Christ” (BIRA III, §3, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120).

¹²⁰ Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 81.

¹²¹ Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 84-5.

¹²² Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 84, 87.

¹²³ Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 89-90.

¹²⁴ Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 97.

¹²⁵ Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 90.

¹²⁶ See respectively, Tan Yun-ka, “From *Ecclesia in Asia* to a Mission of Love and Service,” 97, 90, 93.

¹²⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, §55.

¹²⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §31.

¹²⁹ Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity*,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, compiled and edited by Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 256.

¹³⁰ Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia*,” 256.

stating that “the new missionary activity ... is a proclamation and invitation to live the gospel as a community becoming church.”¹³¹ These statements amplify beautifully the view of the Asian bishops who affirm that “the primary task of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *calling to a personal faith* in Him, inviting to *membership in the Church* those whom God has chosen, and celebrating salvation through Christ in our belonging to His Church. Every other task of the Church flows from and is related to this proclamation and its acceptance in faith” (emphasis added).¹³² This statement leads us to make another observation that there is a fundamental agreement between *Ecclesia in Asia* and the documents of the Asian bishops on the primacy of proclamation.

Indeed, at the “All-Asian Conference on Evangelization” held in South Korea, in 1988, the bishops of Asia affirmed that “the ultimate goal of all evangelization is the ushering in and establishment of God’s Kingdom,” and while evangelisation has many essential aspects such as “witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of the Kingdom,” and the triple dialogue with the poor, the cultures, and the religions of Asia, “there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ,” and “the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity.”¹³³ For them, “to be at the service of the Kingdom means for the Church to announce Jesus Christ.”¹³⁴ They emphasised this point at the Fifth Plenary Assembly in 1990 and added that “proclamation *through* dialogue and deeds” is the “the first call to the Churches in Asia” (emphasis added).¹³⁵ Earlier, in 1974, right at their first plenary assembly held to reflect on “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia,” the Asian bishops affirmed that “evangelization is the carrying out of the Church’s duty by word and witness the Gospel of the Lord,” and “through” the tasks associated with the triple dialogue that “local churches can most effectively preach Christ to our peoples.”¹³⁶ This convergence between the Pope and the FABC on the primacy of proclamation and the importance of dialogue is also expounded by veteran theologians such as Jacques Dupuis, Peter C. Phan, and S.J. Emmanuel.

Contrary to the general thrust of Jonathan Tan’s essay, Dupuis argues that there is a “substantial agreement” on the centrality and priority of the proclamation of Jesus Christ, a view that we are in deep agreement with, between the documents of the FABC over its first two decades of existence and the teachings of John Paul II, especially his *Redemptoris*

¹³¹ S.J. Emmanuel, “Asian Mission for the Next Millennium? Chances and Challenges,” *The Way* (April 1999) 108.

¹³² BIMA IV, §7, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292 [misprinted as BIMA I which was held in 1978 in the Philippines, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 93].

¹³³ BIMA IV, §§5-6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 292; see also BIMA III, §6, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 104. Miguel Marcelo Quatra also places the Kingdom of God at the centre of the Church’s evangelising mission, but contends that “any attempt to place the various activities in hierarchical order with proclamation at the top, gives an unbalanced picture which does not correspond to reality.” See *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents (1970-1995)*, (Quezon City: Claretian, 2000), 193. Earlier, Michael Amaladoss cautioned against a narrow understanding of evangelization “as proclamation leading to baptism and, what is worse, look upon other types of activity as merely means or first steps to proclamation”: *Making All Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism, and Evangelization in Asia* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 57.

¹³⁴ OE, “Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization, Dialogue and Proclamation,” §33, *FAPA Vol. 2*, 201. At a symposium on evangelisation in 2002, using the gift/task logic of *Ecclesia in Asia*, the FABC declared that “the good news of Jesus that we bear is our most precious gift to Asia,” and “to share him with others is the ultimate reason for all our pastoral activity. This mission is a faith imperative.” OE, “Evangelization in Asia: Final Statement of FABC Symposium,” §4, *Origins* 32.16 (26 September 2002), 273.

¹³⁵ FABC V, §4.1, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 282.

¹³⁶ FABC I, §25, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 16.

Missio, an encyclical that the Pope often refers to in *Ecclesia in Asia*.¹³⁷ Likewise, for Peter C. Phan, “ever since its first plenary assembly in Taipei, Taiwan, 1974, the FABC has repeatedly insisted that the *primary task* of the Asian Churches is the proclamation of the gospel. But it has also maintained no less frequently that *the way* to fulfil this task in Asia is by way of dialogue, indeed a triple dialogue with Asian cultures, Asian religions and the Asians themselves, especially the poor” (emphasis added).¹³⁸ In the same article, he expands this idea by stressing that “this new focus of the church’s mission must be the light guiding the ordering of its priorities and the choice of its policies, which must not aim at serving the internal interests of the church but the proclamation of the gospel *through* the triple dialogue” (emphasis added).¹³⁹ Discussing proclamation in the context of the United States with insights from the FABC, Phan states that “it is *through* this triple dialogue ... that the Church in Asia performs its evangelizing mission and thus becomes the local church. Hence, dialogue is not a substitute for proclamation or evangelization; rather, it is *the way*, indeed the most effective way, in which the proclamation of the good news is done in Asia” (emphasis added).¹⁴⁰ Phan’s observations and the statements of the FABC mentioned above, which are peppered with words such as “through” and “the way,” point to a clear distinction between the goal and the means of mission, with proclamation as the objective, and dialogue and witness as the ways. S.J. Emmanuel also refers to this distinction by a discussion of “proclamation and/through the three dialogues.”¹⁴¹ In our view, this essential distinction would permit a more fruitful reading of *Ecclesia in Asia*.

Therefore, to fully understand John Paul II’s theology of evangelisation and to assess it more thoroughly, we propose a contextual interpretation of *Ecclesia in Asia* based upon a clear distinction between the *firmness* with which he imposes compliance with the *doctrinal* principle of proclamation and the *flexibility* that he allows in the *pastoral* practice of triple dialogue. For the Pope, explicit proclamation is a non-negotiable duty and a mandate that is part and parcel of what constitutes the very identity and mission of the Church. However, in difficult situations such as those facing the Churches in Asia, a gradual and pedagogical approach to evangelisation is also acceptable, one that includes both witness and triple dialogue.

In our view, by insisting that Asian Christians must proclaim Jesus as the universal and only saviour, John Paul II has simply followed Christ’s command and the teachings of Vatican II on Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.¹⁴² By affirming that triple dialogue, especially interreligious dialogue, is integral to evangelisation, he has demonstrated a lot of pastoral flexibility by incorporating the concerns of the Asian bishops. This approach shows that while he is firm on theological principles, regardless of whether the audience is the universal Church as in the case of *Redemptoris Missio*, or a local Church as in *Ecclesia in Asia*, he is quite prepared to be flexible by wholeheartedly accepting the mission strategy

¹³⁷ See Jacques Dupuis, “FABC Focus on the Church’s Evangelising Mission in Asia Today,” *Vidyajyoti* 55:9 (September 1992) 468.

¹³⁸ Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia*,” 179.

¹³⁹ Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia*,” 182-3.

¹⁴⁰ Peter C. Phan, “Cultures, Religions, and Power: Proclaiming Christ in the United States Today,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 729.

¹⁴¹ S.J. Emmanuel, “Asian Mission for the Next Millennium? Chances and Challenges,” *The Way* (April 1999): 108.

¹⁴² *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§19-20; Vatican Council II, “*Nostra Aetate*. Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” §2, in *Vatican Council II: Vol. 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, new rev. edition (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), 739.

of triple dialogue as proposed by the bishops of Asia. Like the two types of proclamation discussed in *Redemptoris Missio*, which are complementary, proclamation and triple dialogue should go hand in hand.¹⁴³ Explicit proclamation is obviously the same as the Encyclical's proclamation of the Christ event (the *kerygma* of the apostles), and triple dialogue, with its accent on the building up of the Kingdom of God, relates to the proclamation of the kingdom of God (the content of Jesus' own *kerygma*).

John Paul II's policy of theological firmness and pastoral flexibility is probably the outcome of what he learned from the failure to write a *relatio* that could bring two opposite theological positions at the Synod on Evangelisation in 1974 into a meaningful synthesis. This Synod ended in "a kind of ecclesiastical gridlock,"¹⁴⁴ as the final text, prepared by the then Cardinal Wojtyla, the appointed relator, and the two theologian-secretaries, was not accepted by the Synod participants.¹⁴⁵ At the time, one view was espoused by Father Domenico Grasso who represented "the older classical model of the Roman School," and the other adopted by Father Duraisamy Simon Amalorpavadass who proposed "a new voice from the contemporary world of experience."¹⁴⁶ This tension and the subsequent failure to deliver the final report had surely played a part in his subsequent dealings with local Churches as the supreme Pontiff, and his design of a missionary approach based on two pillars of proclamation and triple dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*. By insisting on the primacy and centrality of proclamation John Paul II has effectively returned to the Christian sources (*ressourcement*) as the duty of proclamation is based on the very commission of Christ, the *Ur*-tradition. By prescribing the triple dialogue as the fundamental task of Asian Christians, he has adapted (*aggiornamento*) the evangelising mission of the Church to the realities of contemporary Asia. So, in *Ecclesia in Asia*, one can detect a replay of the contest at Vatican II between the so-called conservatives and progressives, only this time it is presented on a grander scale and to the wider world of Asia.

By adopting the *fortiter and suaviter* approach to doing Christian mission in Asia, John Paul II has shown himself to be a contextual theologian and pastor par excellence, one who is faithful to the Gospel and the Church's tradition, and at the same time, sensitive to the religious, cultural, and social situations of Asia. This approach also demonstrates that there is no inherent contradiction in his theology of Christian mission as presented in *Ecclesia in Asia*, but a coherent synthesis and a consistency of thought that have the capacity to harmonise different emphases and different shades of meaning often brought into relief by Asian theologians when they reflect on the mission of the Church in Asia. For the Pope, evangelisation in the Asian context includes proclamation, witness, and triple dialogue, and it is our argument that these tasks are also what the FABC prescribes for all Asian Christians, in particular lay people.¹⁴⁷ The final part of this section will explore further this symbiosis between theologies of the laity of the Pope and the Asian bishops. It

¹⁴³ The FABC also considers that "dialogue and proclamation are complementary." BIRA III, §4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 120.

¹⁴⁴ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 221.

¹⁴⁵ According to Weigel, the Synod Fathers, "unable to agree on a text of their own, handed the whole business over to a post-synodal commission, which in turn handed all the material generated by the Synod to Paul VI, suggesting that he do something about it." The result was the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntianti*, "one of the finest documents of Paul VI's pontificate." See Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 221.

¹⁴⁶ Rembert Weakland, "Archbishop's Welcome," *CTSA Proceedings* 56 (2001): viii.

¹⁴⁷ Felix Wilfred observes that, for the FABC, "proclamation is interpreted in terms of witness, dialogue and liberation, without exhausting it in these"; "Images of Jesus Christ in the Asian Pastoral Context: An Interpretation of Documents from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," *Concilium* 2 (April 1993): 55.

also highlights some inevitable divergence in their views given that they see the Church's mission from two different perspectives, one universal and the other local, one rooted in the Western rational thinking and the other steeped in the humus of Asian traditions.

In addition to proclamation and triple dialogue, the tasks that are incumbent on all Asian Christians, both John Paul II and the FABC emphasise witness of life as the fundamental role and mission of the Asian laity. Indeed, for John Paul II, witness of life is the cornerstone of the mission of the Asian laity. In the only section of *Ecclesia in Asia* that carries the heading "The Laity", John Paul II encourages "all lay people to assume their proper role in the life and mission of the People of God as witnesses to Christ wherever they may find themselves."¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere, in a speech to promulgate the post-synodal document in India, he emphasises that lay people are called to "bear witness" to their faith "in a world of contrasts," and to "transform society by infusing the 'mind of Christ' into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the world" in which they live.¹⁴⁹ In his presentation of this papal document, Cardinal Paul Shan of Taiwan also draws attention to the notion of witness. In his words, "as we get to the end of the Apostolic Exhortation we can sense that the most fervent desire of the Holy Father is to see the Church become in the Third Millennium a community of faithful witnesses, a more genuine and transparent witnessing Church."¹⁵⁰ The Asian bishops, like John Paul II, place an enormous importance on the Christian witness of life. At their Seventh Plenary Assembly in 2000, held only two months after the promulgation of *Ecclesia in Asia*, they affirmed that "the most effective means of evangelization and service in the name of Christ has always been and continues to be the witness of life."¹⁵¹ They went on to insist that "this witness has to become the way of the Gospel for persons, institutions and the whole Church community."¹⁵² For them, witness of life is central and indispensable to true proclamation.¹⁵³ It is also noteworthy that in *Christifideles Laici* Christian holiness is defined as the perfection of charity, but in *Ecclesia in Asia* it seems to be associated with genuine witness of life, a view that is much closer to the thinking of the Asian bishops.

Where John Paul II and the FABC may seem to diverge is in regard to the identity of lay people. In *Christifideles Laici*, the Pope provides a definition of the laity based on three pillars of baptism, secularity, and participation of lay people as sharers of the triple mission of Christ.¹⁵⁴ In *Ecclesia in Asia*, he highlights their secular character by speaking of them as missionaries and witnesses to the Gospel in the world. Unlike John Paul II, the FABC describes the laity as Asian Christians,¹⁵⁵ a generic term that emphasises the dual

¹⁴⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §45.

¹⁴⁹ John Paul II, "Finding the Light," in *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (Quezon City: Claretian, 2002), 61; *Ecclesia in Asia*, §22.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Cardinal Shan, "Presentation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* of His Holiness John Paul II on Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: 'That They May Have Life and Have It Abundantly' (Jn. 10:10)" *Japan Mission Journal* 53 (1999): 263-76 at 275.

¹⁵¹ FABC VII, §Part III.C.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 12.

¹⁵² FABC VII, §Part III.C.1, *FAPA Vol. 3*, 12-13.

¹⁵³ OE, §16, "Evangelization in Asia: Final Statement of FABC Symposium," *Origins* 32.16 (26 September 2002): 274.

¹⁵⁴ *Christifideles Laici*, §9. For John Paul II, this secularity must be understood not only in its anthropological and social meanings, but also in a theological sense. *Christifideles Laici*, §15. It is interesting to recall that during the 1950's the motto of the French Workers Priests movement was "Présence au monde est présence à Dieu" (To be present in the world is to be present to God). This movement was banned by Rome but a decade later its theme became the starting point for *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

¹⁵⁵ FABC IV, §§4.1.3, 4.4.2-4.4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 191, 192-3.

calling of faith and cultural belonging, and one that lies at the heart of what it means to be a Christian in Asia. It encompasses laity, religious, and the clergy who, while not ceasing to be Asian Christians, have the specific role of serving and leading the laity in the project of establishing the Kingdom of God.¹⁵⁶ It is at their Fourth Plenary Assembly held to reflect on the vocation and mission of the laity that the bishops of Asia discuss the triple mission of the clergy, that is, with reference to the laity.¹⁵⁷ John Paul II, on the contrary, tends to put more emphasis on the different roles and responsibilities of the pastors, the religious, and the laity in the one mission of the Church.¹⁵⁸ His distinction between the clergy and the laity is anchored in the concept of secularity or presence to the world, which, in his view, is a distinctive character of lay people.

Our discussion in this section shows that the theologies of the laity of John Paul II and the FABC are both based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. However, what informs the Pope and the Asian bishops in the intervening years differs completely from what informed the Council half a century ago. Hence, each of these theologies is by no means a fixed set of doctrinal principles and pastoral guidelines. Rather, each explores a number of themes, which have evolved in response to the challenges of the day, one from a universal view and the other with a more contextual concern. The development of these contextual theologies displays some variance in response to different needs and challenges, hence spawning different theological interpretations. However, with respect to, and within the ambit of, the question of the laity, there is a substantial convergence in the thinking of John Paul II and the Asian bishops.

Conclusion

This essay has examined John Paul II's thought about the laity in *Ecclesia in Asia* with reference to the documents of the Asian bishops. It argues that it is the logic of faith as gift and evangelisation as task that underlines and unifies the entire post-synodal document. Central to this theology of the laity is the theme of "witness of life," a comprehensive concept that the Pope employs to describe and prescribe the vocation and mission of lay people in the Asian Church. As a contextual expression of the integration of faith, proclamation, and Christian living, it lies at the heart of the papal document and succinctly summarises its theology of the laity. In this document, the Pope proceeds from a Christological and Pneumatological perspective to explicate the identity and role of lay people as missionaries and witnesses to the Gospel, who share in the mission of the Church as a witnessing community of faith. This evangelising mission has as its key elements and aspects, proclamation, inculturation, communion, solidarity, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. This paper also proposes a new approach to interpreting John Paul II's theology of evangelisation, one that is based on a basic distinction between the doctrinal firmness (*fortiter*) with which he imposes compliance with the imperative of proclamation and the pastoral flexibility (*suaviter*) that he encourages in the exercise of the triple dialogue with the cultures, the religions, and the poor of Asia. This approach underscores the logic, coherence, and consistency of thought in John Paul II's theology of mission, and offers a modest way to harmonise the different viewpoints on the relationship between evangelisation, proclamation, and interreligious dialogue.

¹⁵⁶ FABC IV, §4.4.4., *FAPA Vol. 1*, 193.

¹⁵⁷ FABC IV, §4.4, *FAPA Vol. 1*, 192-3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§43-45.

In the works considered, both John Paul II and the FABC have followed a contextual approach in their probing into the question of the laity. Both draw their inspiration from the same theological sources, especially the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, but each addresses a different audience and confronts a different set of issues, one of a universal character and the other of a localised context. While in *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope seems to maintain a distinction, but not separation, between the laity and the clergy by an emphasis on the secularity of lay people, the FABC prefers to opt for an encompassing description of the laity as Asian Christians. However, their main findings on the issue of the laity are remarkably similar, and their thoughts on the role of lay people converge. In the post-synodal document, holiness of life is associated with witness of life, a concept that is fundamental to the true proclamation of Jesus Christ, and one that is also adopted by the Asian bishops. For both John Paul II and the FABC, the mission of Asian Christians, in particular the laity, includes the proclamation of the Gospel, the triple dialogue, and the imperative of witness of life, an integral dimension of these activities, and a special calling of lay people in Asia. The tenets of John Paul II's theology of the laity offer a fruitful line of thought for Asian Christians, and serve as a reminder that the constructions of theology should never be divorced from both the Gospel and the local context.¹⁵⁹

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