

The Response of the Asian Church to Religious Pluralism: BECs and BHCs as loci of Dialogue

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Asia is the birthplace of many of the world's ancient civilizations, cultures and religions; it is a continent blessed with vibrant communities with their colorful mixture of cultures, religions and philosophies, many of which are more ancient than Christianity. While Asia is a home to some two-thirds of the world population, nevertheless it remains the continent with the smallest Christian population. In Asia only 4.5% of the total population is Christian and only less than 3% of Asia's population is Catholic. In the face of this multi-religious and minority situation of Christians in Asia the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC), positively appreciating this pluralism and diversity as enriching and complementing, proposes a threefold dialogue; dialogue with cultures, religions and the situation of poverty in Asia. It proposes a theology of Harmony as a foundation of these threefold dialogue. Many FABC documents call upon the Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities (SCCs/BECs) to face squarely this situation of religious pluralism and minority state of Christianity in Asia and engage into dialogue with the people of other faiths. Basic Human Community (BHC) is proposed as a viable model to address these issues. The pastoral experience referred to in this paper indicates that BHCs can serve as the locus of inter religious humanism. Thus if BHCs are formed well that will give a facelift to the Christian humanistic perspective. This piece of research presents the vision of the FABC about religious pluralism as emerging from its documents and narrating its pastoral experience in the grass root context of Jaffna, identifies the following pastoral and theological challenges: The claim of the Christians as People of God, exclusivist approach of some BECs, the issue of salvific value of other religions, becoming a truly participatory church, lack of suitable presentation of Jesus Christ and lack of accommodative ecclesiology. The pastoral challenges identified demand a rigorous theological probe into those areas. This paper however not attempts to provide solutions to all the challenges but tries to find out ways and means to share the richness of Christianity in a humble journey of dialogue at the grassroots with the sisters and brothers of other faiths.

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