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**VATICAN II AS AN ECCLESIAL
PENTECOST**

Jojo M. Fung, SJ[♦]

"If this movement does in fact come from God you will be unable to destroy it"
(Acts 5:39)

For many enthused and committed Church members and leaders around the world, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council has been an "ecclesial Pentecost" with a global ripple effect. It is as if all the tightly shut apertures of the Church were flung open to allow God's Spirit to blow afresh within and purify her of the decadent energy that smothers the Church for centuries. The mighty wind of God's Spirit has infused energy and life into those fossilized structures and enkindled the rank and file of the Church with intellectual vigour and pastoral zeal. The factors that occasioned this historic event remind us of the unpredictable ways of God's omnipresent Spirit. The dynamism of this august event is still being felt in the ecclesial movements such as the basic ecclesial communities in the different local Churches.

Much will be said about the elements of surprise, fervour and grace in the first section and how this new dynamism is under threat in the twenty first century to the chagrin of the regional critics of the 'reform of the reforms'. Yet Vatican II is only the beginning of an

[♦]**Fr. Jojo M. Fung, SJ** hails from Malaysia. He teaches Contextual Theology at the East Asian Pastoral Institute and the Loyola School of Theology, Manila. He has published many articles on contextual theology, missiology, environmental theology and ethics. Upcoming book: *A Shamanic Theology of Sacred Sustainability: Asian Church in Dialogue with Shamans for Liberative Struggle*. He serves as a coordinator of the Jesuit network known as Jesuit Companions in Indigenous ministry under the aegis of JCAP (Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific). Email: jojodear@gmail.com

ongoing process of renewal that takes the Church beyond its conciliar horizon, as explained in section two, with regard to the dialogue of religious experience that enables the forerunners of the Church to cross the religio-cultural threshold of the indigenous peoples to the frontier of ritual celebration that enables the forerunners to experience the everyday sacredness of life. The lived experience at the frontier enables the forerunners to articulate the theological significance of the shamanic traditions and the shamans. Furthermore, the lived experience reconstitutes the identity of the local Churches and the forerunners. Since the renewal is about a conciliar dynamism that points to the future, section three outlines some of the pertinent issues that warrant ongoing reflection at the level of the local Churches in lieu of another ecumenical council in the unforeseeable future.

1. A Surging Surprise

1.1. The Unexpected

On that memorable January 25, 1959, the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul, in the basilica dedicated to him, Pope XXIII surprised the College of Cardinals and the universal Church with the announcement of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Led by Pope John XXIII, the Catholic Church crossed a very historic threshold. In referring to the origin and reason of calling the council, Pope John XXIII remarked, "It was completely unexpected, like a flash of heavenly light, shedding sweetness in the eyes and hearts. And at the same time, it gave rise to a great fervour throughout the world in expectation of the holding of the Council."¹ The pope referred to the three years of laborious preparation as "a first sign, an initial gift of celestial grace."² In closing, the Pope remarked, "we might say that heaven and earth are united in the holding of the Council – the saints of heaven to protect our work, the faithful of the earth continuing in prayer to the Lord, and you seconding the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order that the work of all may correspond to the modern expectations and needs of the various peoples of the world."³

¹James Kroeger, *Exploring the Treasures of Vatican II*, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications and Jesuit Communications, 2011, 82-83.

²James Kroeger, *Exploring the Treasures of Vatican II*, 84.

³James Kroeger, *Exploring the Treasures of Vatican II*, 93.

1.2. A Looming Peril

Fifty years later, there are growing anxieties that the process of aggiornamento initiated at Vatican II is in danger of being derailed by those who have been resisting the ecclesial reform from the start. The call for "a reform of the postcolonial reform" has created such confusion and frustration in the critical-minded reformists in the rank and file of the global communion of local Churches.

1.3. The Dissenting Voices

Around the globe, many critics have registered their dissent, protest and announce their verdict of such stymieing efforts of the minority.

From Asia, a world renowned liturgist of the Philippines, Anscar J. Chupungo, presented a paper⁴ in which he described Vatican II as a "springtime" when the local Churches experience "the flowering of liturgical worship."⁵ Yet he unequivocally laments the curial closure of this springtime.

But even before we could, with satisfaction, gather the flowers and harvest the fruits of summer, a cold wind has begun to blow on the face of the post-conciliar reform. The autumn leaves are starting to fall. No less than the papal master of ceremonies, Msgr. Guido Marini, announced on January 6, 2010 that there is need for a new reform of the liturgy. He intimated that the post-conciliar experts did not grasp fully the meaning and intention of the liturgy constitution, which they had drafted and presented to the council fathers. He claimed that as a result, the post-conciliar reform has "not always in its practical implementation found a timely and happy fulfilment".⁶

His verdict comes with no surprise to any subscriber of the post-conciliar reform. "The agenda is, to all appearance, an attempt to put the clock back half a century. It seems to conveniently forget that since Vatican II, the Church has been marching with the times, acknowledging the changes in social and religious culture, and adopting new pastoral strategies."⁷

⁴See his paper, "Liturgy Studies and Liturgical Renewal," read on the occasion of the launch of The Broken Bay Institute - University of Newcastle's Graduate Certificate in Theology – Liturgical Studies and Master of Theology – Liturgical Studies degrees, 21 January, 2010, Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney, Australia.

⁵Anscar J. Chupungco, "Liturgy Studies and Liturgical Renewal," 1.

⁶Anscar J. Chupungco, "Liturgy Studies and Liturgical Renewal," 1.

⁷Anscar J. Chupungco, "Liturgy Studies and Liturgical Renewal," 1.

Again from Asia, Aloysius Pieris points out that "the Roman Church is under pressure from a powerful opulent minority to restore certain Tridentine reforms that have been superseded by the renewal project of Vatican II."⁸ Pieris notes:

The chaos of this regressive policy of the 'reform of the reforms' has created in the Churches is well symbolized in the New English Missal; its literal rendering of Tridentine Latin into unidiomatic English has ruined the solemnity of the liturgy and often even the theological intent of the liturgical texts. The contemporary current of "tridentism" is only a more organized and more orchestrated version of the "Back to Trent" call whispered by a minority at the *aula magna* in which Vatican II held its four conciliar sessions fifty years ago. The difference is that their voice is now broadcast unabashedly from places where fidelity to a general council is most expected.⁹

His concluding verdict is stunningly damning:

The return to a non-ecumenical provincial Council on the part of a vocal minority, after witnessing an authoritative General Council of the Universal Church as Vatican II taking place before their eyes, is nothing less than a disdainful rejection of the supreme Magisterium... Hence, the obvious conclusion: now that Vatican II, the first ecumenical council of the world Church, has re-oriented certain deflections of the Western Patriarch's Provincial Council held in Trent, whoever does not accept these reorientations has abandoned his or her allegiance to the authority of the Church.¹⁰

Had the Ecumenical Council not abandoned its provincial condemnatory nature, this minority would have been anathematized for their intransigent and recalcitrant disobedience to the supreme magisterium of the Church!

From Latin America, a highly respected Latin American theologian, Jose Comblin, in an article posthumously published entitled "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later" claimed that "it's only fault" as an Ecumenical Council" was that it came too late"¹¹ toward the end of an historical epoch of fifteen centuries! Comblin attributed the failure of Vatican II

⁸Aloysius Pieris, "The dread of Vatican II and the Nostalgia for Trent: Golden Jubilee Reflections on the First Worldwide Council in history (1962-2012)," *Vagdevi: Journal of Religious Reflection*, 6, 1, (January 2012) 5-14.

⁹Aloysius Pieris, "The dread of Vatican II and the Nostalgia for Trent...," 5.

¹⁰Aloysius Pieris, "The dread of Vatican II and the Nostalgia for Trent...," 13.

¹¹Jose Comblin, "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later," *Vagdevi: Journal of Religious Reflection*, 6, 1, (January 2012) 15-31.

to reform the Church to the scandalous power-play in the Roman Curia.

The Pope had no power to change the Curia. To this day the Popes are prisoners of the Curia that in principle depends on them. The administration is stronger than the ruler in the Church, as in many nations. The administration can prevent any change just by its inertia. Not even John Paul II dared to in the Curia.¹²

The conservatives decried that the Council "was misinterpreted" and clamoured through the extraordinary synod in 1985 to demand the "correct interpretation" which was exploited to "suppress all that was new in the documents of Vatican II."¹³ Subsequently, instigated by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, the term "people of God" was expunged from the documents and John Paul II sanctioned the oft-repeated papal edict "the time of experimentation is over."¹⁴ Comblin did not hesitate to mention the galvanizing efforts of the "restorationists" to extend "their restrictions on anything new" beyond the text of the conciliar documents to the aula of the papal conclave.¹⁵

Comblin issued a clarion call to resist and to condemn such ecclesial-curial power-game. "There are still powerful movements that preach a return to the past. We have to protest. When people who know nothing of the evolution of the contemporary world and want to take refuge in a past without openness to the future, we must condemn it."¹⁶

David Tracy, speaking from North America, commends "the genuine gains of modernity first released by Vatican II after two centuries of Catholic resistance to modernity,"¹⁷ but bemoans "an age of official ecclesial retrenchment and reaction" that thwarts the "self-reforming impulses of Vatican II" which "are now stymied at every point by those whose views are not post-Enlightenment at all, but, at best, pre-Enlightenment."¹⁸ Bishop Anthony Ruff, OSB, the eminent US liturgical scholar, who resigned from the US national commission for preparing the faithful to use the new Roman Missal, lamented the deep

¹²Jose Comblin, "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later," 17.

¹³Jose Comblin, "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later," 18, 24.

¹⁴Jose Comblin, "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later," 18, 24.

¹⁵Jose Comblin, "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later," 19.

¹⁶Jose Comblin, "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later," 30-31.

¹⁷David Tracy, *Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics and Church*, New York: SCM Press and London: Orbis Books, 1991, 80.

¹⁸David Tracy, *Naming the Present*, 73.

problems in the structures of authority in the Church. He believes that "the forthcoming missal is but a part of a larger patter of top-down impositions by a central authority that does not consider itself accountable to the larger Church." Bishop Ruff adds an aggrieved note,

When I think of how secretive the translation process was, how little consultation was done with priests or laity ... how unsatisfactory the text is, how this text was imposed on national conferences of bishops in violation of their legitimate Episcopal authority and then when I think of Our Lord's teaching on service and love and unity.... I weep.¹⁹

1.4. A Dynamic Process

Yet Vatican II is not the 'last word' but "the 'first word', "the beginning of an ongoing renewal ever point to a future," "summoning a movement of renovation to be undertaken by all the Churches."²⁰ Vatican II remains "a prophetic sign" and "an evangelical voice" in the modern world.²¹ Vatican II resembles a juggernaut set in motion on a trajectory that is as unstoppable as the Spirit-driven nascent Christian movement that was inaugurated at the Lucan Pentecost. An ecclesial Pentecost of the 1962 have since become the localized ecclesial Pentecost of the many local Churches where the renewal is very much inspired and sustained by God's omnipresent Spirit. Indeed Vatican II has set in motion a process of renewal that enables many forerunners – bishops, theologians, ordained and consecrated personnel and ecclesial leaders to cross many more other thresholds where God is experienced as active in hitherto unknown frontiers beyond the Church.

2. Beyond the Conciliar Horizon

Fifty years after Vatican II, the Church universal has become polycentric. Many other (other than North Atlantic) centres have come into existence from whence the postcolonial-postmodern voices

¹⁹Kevin T. Kelly extrapolated from the uprising at Tahrir Square the "growing unease about the imposition of the new translation of the Roman Missal" which is symptomatic of a besieged Church governance that disregards the conciliar legacy of collegiality that promotes the involvement of the Episcopal conferences, regional Presbyterial councils and the faithful through collaborative ministry and co-responsibility. For more detail see Kevin T. Kelly, "The Power behind the New English Translation of the Roman Missal," in *Sacramentalizing Human History*, in Erik Borgman, Pual D. Murray and Andres Torres Queiruga, ed., *In Honour of Edward Schillebeeckx 1917-2009, Concilium* 1, London: SCM Press, 2012, 112.

²⁰Aloysius Pieris, "The dread of Vatican II and the Nostalgia for Trent...," 13.

²¹Jose Comblin, "Vatican II: Fifty Years Later," 30.

of the once denied and decentred subjects are crying out to be heard. Among the many concerns, these multiple voices call for greater solidarity with the genuine others who are believers of the primal religions. Second, this solidarity involves a conversation with the different centres that engage in a concerted process of discerning, elevating and articulating the richness of primal religiosities. Finally, it is a solidarity with fellow theologians of the different centres to mount a global multilevel advocacy of the theological significance of the religio-cultural legacy and the shamans of indigenous peoples.

In Asia, this theological advocacy has gone beyond *Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes*. The post-conciliar recognition of the "elements of truth, grace and goodness ... not only in the minds and hearts" of the other believers but also in "the particular rites and cultures of peoples" (AG 9) have facilitated more pertinent theological reflection at the frontier of religious experience in dialogue with the religio-cultural traditions of the primal religion, leading to new understanding of the sacred, the lived theology and the relational identity of the forerunners.

2.1. Religio-Cultural Frontier: Locus of the Sacred

The ritual sites, be it the home or the forest in the vicinity, where the indigenous communities congregate with their shamans, healers and elders (men and women) for the seasonal shamanic rituals constitute the new frontier for the forerunners of Asia. The presence and participation of the forerunners at such a religio-cultural frontier is a *conditio sine non qua* for the dialogue of religious experience.²²

²²In this article the words shamanic and religio-cultural are used interchangeably. Participation in the shamanic rituals draws its assurance and inspiration from the Asian Bishops who declares that "Christians believe that God's saving will is at work, in different ways, in all religions. It has been recognized since the time of the apostolic Church, and stated clearly again by the Second Vatican Council (cf. GS 22; LG16) that the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church" (cf. *Redemptorhominis* 6). "God's saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person.... His ways are mysterious and unfathomable, and no one can dictate the direction of His grace" [BIRA II (Kuala Lumpur):12]. Furthermore, "in Asia, the dialogue of prayer and spirituality is highly valued. Prayer together, in ways congruent with the faith of those who take part, is an occasion for Christians and followers of other faiths to appreciate better the spiritual riches which each group possesses, as well as to grow in respect for one another as fellow pilgrims on the path through life. Human solidarity is deepened when people approach the divine as one human family" [FIRA IV, Pattaya, 8]. FABC III, held in Bangkok, 1982, urges the Church of Asia to journey with people of other faiths in

The occasion in this instance was the water-spirit ritual celebration before the planting of rice seedlings in the paddy fields celebrated by the Karen community of Dokdaeng.²³ The village community chose the ritual site in the forest near the water source that provides water to irrigate the paddy fields. A "spirit-house" was constructed by the villagers, using bamboo, branches and leaves. Offerings were put in the "spirit-house" and a chicken was slaughtered and the blood smeared on the twigs that prop up the "spirit house". The rice-wine from each family was poured into a silver bowl and the ritual specialist made an offertory and petitionary prayer to Creator, *TajHtiTajTau* and the nature spirits or owners of nature to bless the upcoming rice-planting season in May-June so that there will be an abundant yield for the villagers. There was a light drizzle after the prayer. The ritual specialist, Kihe by name, joyfully remarked that the light drizzle was an affirmative sign of blessing from *Taj Hti Taj Tau*.²⁴ After the offertory, the silver bowl was passed around and every participant drank from it. Then the families cook and ate lunch together. After lunch, leaders of other religions were invited to offer their prayers. The catechist led a prayer to the Creator based on the passage of the first chapter of Genesis. A Buddhist leader offered a prayer on behalf of his community. Subsequently, a second bowl of rice-wine is offered and the silver bowl was passed around and every participant took a sip. When all had their sip, the ritual ended. The participants headed home.

These shamanic frontiers of the indigenous peoples of Asia are the contemporary "burning bush" that reveals anew the omnipresence of God's Spirit who is already "actively present" and "presently active" in the ritual celebrations of the religious poor of Asia.²⁵ A critical discerning reflection on the experience enables the forerunners to arrive at a felt-conviction that the God's Spirit is antecedent to our arrival²⁶ and God is at the core of the religious experience of the

dialogue so that we can better "discern how God speaks to them in their lives, rituals and histories and through them to us as well."

²³Participation in the water-spirit ritual took place in the Karen village called Dokdaeng on Monday, May 16, 2011, Northern Thailand.

²⁴After the first offertory and petitionary prayer, Dr. SunthornWomjompornwho acted as a translator broke the good news to me.

²⁵BIRA II, Kuala Lumpur, 12; and *Redemptorhominis*, 6.

²⁶The 34th General Congregation, Decree 4 on *Mission & Culture*, in no. 17 clearly states, "The ministry of dialogue is conducted with a sense that God's action is antecedent to ours."

sacredness of life. By way of dreams, events like sickness, accidents, the call of the birds, the appearance of certain animals, the religious poor among the Karen villagers, especially the shamans, healers and elders, live with an innate sense of the "everydayness" of the sacred. Life is no longer sacred and profane but a mystical whole. In this cosmology, the indigenous poor of Asia are the existential symbols of the everyday sacredness of life.

2.2. Shamanic Traditions: Locus of Lived Theology

The lived experience of the ritual sacredness informs the forerunners that the shamanic traditions have hitherto unarticulated theological significance.²⁷ In doing contextualized "theologizing", forerunners realized that embedded in the Karen communal memories and traditions are the living local theologies that they live and practice. In other word, the religiosity of the primal believers enables them (especially the shamans) to live a reverential relationship with *Taj Hti Taj Tau* that is rightfully an indigenous theology that beholds the creator as life-giver and sustainer of nature and humankind. At the same time, it is a theology of relationality with the creator and creative spirit working through the nature spirits (of the field, forest, paddy, river, water) to bring blessing during the new planting season. This theology of relationality with the creator governs a communal sense of sharing of food and wine among the ritual participants. In other word, this lived theology of relationality is the basis of a lived theology of communion. The lived theology of relationality reinforces the relation of the indigenous villagers with the nature-spirits. This is the lived pneumatology of the Karen villagers. At the core of a lived theology and pneumatology is an experiential spirituality that bespeaks of a lived mysticism of everyday sacredness. This lived mysticism enables the indigenous villagers to relate to the environment with a sense of reciprocity, knowing that what is being offered (eg. chicken, food and rice-wine) will be reciprocated by the creator by way of the abundant blessing of a rich harvest of paddy at the end of the season. It is a relational

²⁷The document "Spirit at Work in Asia Today" (FABC Papers 81) declares that "over the centuries God has been speaking to indigenous peoples through their cultures" (1998, 26) "and that "much of the indigenous peoples' world view and ethos is compatible with the Christian faith" (ibid.) so much so that their "traditional beliefs, rites, myths and symbols of indigenous peoples provide material for developing indigenous theologies and liturgical ceremonies."

reciprocity between the indigenous villagers and the creator and nature-spirits, characterized by a living faith that manifests itself in great reverence for nature and the earth.

In participating in an interfaith ritual celebration, the interface (intra-dialogue and interfaith) between the Gospel and this lived indigenous theology, the forerunners are enriched in their Christian faith. At the level of affectivity where God's Spirit directs, motivates and leads the forerunners, there is greater felt-resonance between the lived theology and the Christian theology (of God, communion and the Spirit) than dissonance. In fact, the participation of the Buddhists, the Christians and the traditional believers truly enrich this ritual celebration, transforming it into an emergent Asian way of other faiths participating in the rituals of primal religions. This Asian Interfaith prayer "is an occasion for Christians and followers of other faiths to appreciate better the spiritual riches which each group possesses, as well as to grow in respect for one another as fellow pilgrims on the path through life. Human solidarity is deepened when people approach the divine as one human family."²⁸ At all times, this dialogue of prayer, lived theology and spirituality should be highly valued by the local Churches.

2.3. Shamans as theological exemplars of Christ

The articulation of the theological significance of the shamanic traditions necessitates a corresponding explanation of the theological significance of the role of the shamans. Since shamans are intermediaries of the sacred, there are types or exemplars of Jesus.²⁹ Like Jesus who identifies himself with the majority of the populace in early Palestine, the shamans too immerse themselves totally in the daily grind of economic poverty and political marginalization of the indigenous communities. Their ritual services bring healings to the sick, deliver and set free those who are influenced by bad spirits, and recreate sacred space. Their presence, knowledge and wisdom have

²⁸FIRA IV, Pattaya, 8, 10.

²⁹The shamans are a theological type of Jesus or the Christological shamanic types for two obvious reasons. Like Jesus, the shamans' sacred place is not restricted to "one holy place but is connected to the shaman's bodily presence and immediate communication with the divine" and second, they "use religion as a dynamic power for social and religious change." For more details, see Pieter Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in Anthropological-Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2008, 200.

inspired the communities to share what they have, like the miracles of the fish and loaves (Mk 6:30-44, 8:1-10; Mt 4:13-21; Lk 9:10-17, Jn 6:1-13), in order to attain a more sustainable livelihood in their ancestral homeland. Their presence and their communal services liken them to Christ.

Engaged in the liberative struggle against violence and desecration of the ancestral homeland, the shamans typify the life of Christ as they express their identification with the indigenous peoples who are often regarded as the "last" and "least" if not "last of the last" of society (cf. Mt 22:1-14; Lk 14:16-24). Like Jesus, in the inclusive table fellowship, the shamans are bringing about "solidarity from below"³⁰ where the asymmetrical power-relations are reversed as exemplified in the story of feet-washing (Jn 13:1-20) and sharing of wealth by the have-nots with those who are "victims of exploitation and tragic circumstances."³¹ Engaging in the struggle for sustainable livelihood and dignity, shamans are Christ-like in living as persons for others, at the margin, much like the prophets whom *Yahweh* commanded to exercise "prophetic re/action against the *status quo*, awaiting further actions *from* and surprises by the God who makes all things possible."³²

By virtue of the Incarnation, the shamans are the human face of Christ since Christ took on a human form, then every human being, the shamans included, is an image of Christ (Phil 2:1-6), made flesh (Jn 1:14) and dwelt amongst us (1 Cor 14:25) as *Immanuel* (Mt 1:23) for the liberation of humankind from all forms of desecration and violence. More so, in the light of John Paul II's 1993 pronouncement that "Christ is a Native American" in Midland, Canada, and Schotroff's postulation, "I think it theologically legitimate, as well as necessary, to extend the hymn of Christ: Christ took the form of a woman,"³³ it can be argued that Christ too has taken the form of a Galilean shaman and that the shamans are theological exemplars of Christ.

³⁰Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, New York: Crossroad, 1994, 148.

³¹David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 117-118.

³²Tony Neelankavil, "The priesthood and the Challenges of Secularization and Post-modernity," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* (February) 74/2: 98.

³³Louis Schotroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*. Trans. Barbara and Martin Rumschedit, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 45.

2.4. Asianizing the Church

This recognition of the theological significance of the shamanic traditions and indigenous and the shamans is the basis for the Church to encourage the indigenous Christians to participate in the rituals of the primal religions. Moreover, this recognition ensures that the process of inculturation is dialogical and reciprocal, characterized by "originality, creativity and inventiveness, with boldness and courage."³⁴ Such boldness and courage will not truncate the religio-cultural traditions of the indigenous peoples, hollow their rituals and their lived theology of meaning but (re)root the indigenous Christians more firmly in their indigenous identity.

Only when their shamanic "traditions are taken up, not diminished or destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified if need be, and fulfilled ... in the life of the Spirit"³⁵ are the indigenous Christians made to feel that their religio-cultural legacy is deeply inculturated in the faith and vice-versa. Faith and culture has become one in their hearts and lives. They are made to feel that they are indigenous and Christian at the same time.

When indigenous Christians experience such a unified whole in their identity, their lives testify to what John Paul II remarked "*You do not have to be people divided into two parts.*"³⁶ Just as the aboriginal Catholics of Australia are being exhorted not "to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them," the indigenous Christians should not have to borrow the faith and life of the primal religions from those who live and practice them since they are encouraged to remain rooted in their shamanic traditions.

³⁴ACMC (Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church) document asserts in no. 26 that "Asian Churches then must become truly Asian in all things. The principle of indigenization and inculturation is at the very root of their coming into their own. The ministry of Asian Churches, if it is to be authentic, must be relevant to Asian societies. This calls on the part of the Churches for originality, creativity and inventiveness, for boldness and courage."

³⁵IMC (International Mission Congress), Manila 15.

³⁶See John Paul II's Address to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders at Blatherskite Park, Alice Spring, 29 November 1986, no. 12, available [on line], http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia_en.html, accessed July 30, 2011.

The dialogue of religious experience at the frontier is the pathway for the local Church to be reconstituted as Asian and inculturated.³⁷ This pathway calls for "a radical emptying (*kenosis*) in its thought patterns, ritual forms and community structures"³⁸ so that the Church of Asia is disposed to receive and be enriched by the indigenous shamanic traditions. In this humble *kenosis*, the local Church is inevitably Asianized in the way of "thinking, praying, living" and thus Asianized in "communicating their own Christ-experience to others."³⁹ The ability to receive the richness of the primal religious traditions will deepen the realization of the ecclesial leadership in the local Churches that the Kingdom of God extends "far beyond the boundaries of the Church." The reign of God impinges upon the primal believers to "open themselves to the transcendent divine mystery" and motivates that "gout of themselves in love and service to fellow humans."⁴⁰

2.5. A Reconstituted Identity

Crossing the threshold to engage in dialogue at the frontier also reconstitutes the identity of the forerunners by which attention has to be given to the affective state of resonance or dissonance, consolation or desolation before, during and after participating in the indigenous ritual celebration. This discerning introspection enables the forerunners to constantly discern God's presence and actions and increasingly ascertains the forerunners' identity in relation to the God who beckons them from yonder the threshold.

The transformation within the forerunners is identifiable. As a priest of the Society of Jesus, the dialogue has reinforced my self-identity as a religious who is called to be interreligious and thus called to actively participate in the shamanic rituals of the primal religions. The dialogue of religious experience deepens my understanding of the life-giving shamanic spirits in that these spirits participate in

³⁷FIRA stands for Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs. See FIRA II, Pattaya, Thailand, 3.5.

³⁸FIESA stands for Faith Encounters in Social Action. See FEISA I, Pattaya, 7.5.1. Likewise, BIRA(Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs) IV/7 that was held in Tagaytay, in no. 16 states,"Dialogue, finally, demands a total Christ-like self-emptying so that, led by the Spirit, we may be more effective instruments in building up God's Kingdom."

³⁹ACMC, Hong Kong, 14.

⁴⁰Conclusions of Theological Consultation/CTC, HuaHin, 29-30.

God's Creative Spirit. These shamanic spirits are at God's disposal for God's purpose of preserving nature and calling forth human reverence as nature is inviolably sacred. These shamanic spirits come to the assistance of the community through the intermediary of the (women and men) shamans.

Like Jesus of Nazareth who is spirit-possessed by God from the moment of his baptism at river Jordan, I too felt that God's Spirit has possessed me. God's Spirit has sustained me in the various opportunities of participating in the shamanic rituals and I experienced God's power transforming me within so that I am being configured more intimately to the priesthood of Christ. I must admit that it is a process of being "*sacerdotally Christified*" to the extent that I find myself configured more and more to Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the beloved Son (Mk 1:9-11, cf. Jn 1:31). In him, in his image, I realized how my identity as a Jesuit priest is indelibly marked at baptism, confirmation and at ordination. Jesus of Nazareth has become the exemplar *par excellence* for Asian forerunners like me.

Just as Jesus has transformed the apostolic leadership with the Creative Power of God, the forerunners will experience the transformative power of God *Ruah* working through the religio-cultural rituals. The transformation will enable the forerunners to relate to the shamanic spirits as channels of God's creative power. They will regard the indigenous shamans, healers and villagers as genuine other who have much to contribute to the Asianization of the Church and the indigenization of the Church's theologies.

The indwelling Spirit who has configured Jesus to the Omnipresent God will also configure the forerunners to be like Jesus in his relationship with God. As this Omnipresent God is the personal centre of Jesus' life and mission, this God is also the centre of the cultural and religious other. Indeed the Omnipresent God is the *relational God-Centre* now enfleshed in Jesus. By virtue of the Incarnation (God humanized), Jesus too becomes the incarnate *relational God-Centre* who also indwells in the cultural and religious other of our times. Since this *relational God-Centre of Jesus* has become the Risen Lord who is everywhere, in everyone and everything, the forerunners too will be like Jesus, able to engage in the multiple relationships with people of diverse cultures and religions, even with the multiple worlds of the seen and unseen, humans and spirits.

The *relational God-centre* is the centre where God is the source of sacred power for sacralizing and sustaining all *anthropos* and *cosmos*. God is indeed the centre where the Creative *Ruah* sacredly sustains all *anthropos* in all cultures, religions and thus the entire creation. This *relational God-centre* enables the forerunners to recognize the *relational God-centre* in other cultures and religions, both the cultural and religious other. For where there is life, breath, affective movements of compassion, justice, love, peace, there God's Creative Spirit is present and active. There at the hitherto unexplored frontiers, the Asian forerunners are prompted to collaborate with God's Creative *Ruah* in promoting God' reign. In experiencing this *relational God-Centre* as the source of sacred sustainability of LIFE in the *anthropos* and the *cosmos*, the Asian forerunners become all the more grateful for the Creative power of sacred sustainability in everyone and everything in all cultures and religions.⁴¹

Firmly grounded in the religious and everyday experience of the *relational God-Centre*, the forerunners find themselves suspended in a web of "*multiple relationality*" where God is to be found at the centre as much as the different points in the entire expanse of the web and even beyond the web. In this world of "*multiple relationality*," the Galilean Jesus-Risen-With-God enables the Asian forerunners to be anchored in the foundational *relational God-Centre* in whom they move and live and have their beings (Acts 17:28).

3. A Future of Conciliar Dynamism

Amidst fears of an impinging ecclesial winter with the return of ecclesiastic centralism, there is still hope that the conciliar dynamism remains operative at the frontiers of the local Churches of Asia, African, North and Latin America. The conciliar dynamism has its source in God's antecedent presence that is active in the various centres. This active PRESENCE facilitates the numerous multilevel dialogue with the world and primal religions, the diverse cultures and the poor in an attempt to establish a more inculturated local Churches. God's antecedent dynamism facilitates the greater collaboration and conversation among these centres which in turn invigorates the struggle for justice and liberation, a democratic ethos,

⁴¹For details on sacred sustainability, see Jojo M. Fung, "Newness and Boldness Of Approaches For Effective Evangelization and Misisology," *Asian Horizons*, 5/4, December 2011, 778-795.

individual human rights, the collective rights of indigenous peoples or nations, genuine pluralism, and reconciliation with the environment.

The conciliar dynamism continues to open up discursive spaces for the local Churches to reflect on contemporary issues. According to the appraisal of Bishop Antonio Celso de Queiros,⁴² it is not a misplaced hope to have another ecumenical council since many contemporary problems have not been addressed in the Second Vatican Council. In the meantime, pertinent issues that warrant the discursive attention of the local Churches are:

- In a secularized world dominated by techno-economics whence religion is privatized, many Christians especially the young and adult professionals have abandoned the practice of faith and do not refer to it in their lives;
- The need for more formal recognition of the principles of subsidiarity and collegiality of the local Churches and the regional Episcopal conferences in making decisions with regard to the inculturation of faith and morals that facilitates the corresponding indigenization of the thought patterns, ritual forms and community structures of the local Churches so that the Church is truly local/contextual in her manner of praying, celebrating, governing and theologizing;
- The need of opening of ministries to priests who have abandoned ordained ministry;
- That inculturation be characterized by a sense of reciprocity that encourages Church members to participate in the interfaith ritual celebration related to their shamanic traditions so that the noble and honourable values and practices therein strengthen their indigenous identity and enabled the Church members that their indigenous identity and Christian faith is a unified whole;
- That ecclesial space be offered for the theological deliberation on sacramental place and baptismal role of three categories of faithful in the light of the New Evangelization: (a) the re-married couples who are living a responsible conjugal life; (b) the divorced partners through no fault of their own, yet exercise a responsible parenthood

⁴²Bishop Antonio Celso de Queiros, "Is it time for another ecumenical council?," *Vagdevi*, 11 (January 2012), 34-35.

and (c) the married couples who voice their collective dissent in relation to certain moral positions of the Church;

- The re-imagining of the polycentric Church wherein the different communion of local Churches makes possible the existence of the Church of Rome as the hub that exercises a role of strengthening the communion of local Churches in the world Church rather than a perpetuation of the perceived asymmetrical power-relations within the universal communion of the local Churches;
- That the global Church, in conversation with the international institutions like the UN, IMF, WTO exert greater pressure to bring about open government in all countries, including the Church and religious institutions;⁴³
- That all religions and people of goodwill engage in an interdisciplinary conversation in overcoming the gap between green economy, the science of green technology and the massive poverty, the indoor-outdoor pollution among the poor in developing nations⁴⁴ in a global attempt to promote greater sustainability of life on our planetary home Earth.⁴⁵

The enumeration is by no means exhaustive. Neither is the discursive space exhaustible as long as the conciliar dynamism periodically opens the floodgate for the emergence of the latent power of an incarnate God who works in unfathomable ways to advance the reign of God in the modern world.

Conclusion

The 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council serves as a timely reminder that Vatican II is an ecclesial Pentecost with a conciliar dynamism that points to a God who is not only antecedent to the Church but unprecedented in Her ways of realizing Her dreams and desires for Her people in the world. God remains elusive to any earthly hegemonic powers and the opulent minority of Church. The conciliar dynamism within the self-reforming impulses

⁴³The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was launched on September 20, 2011, in New York by President Barack Obama of US and President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil. For details, see www.internationalbudget.org/what-we-do/major-ibp-initiatives/international-advocacy/open-government-partnership/; accessed on 13-01-2012.

⁴⁴Bjorn Lomborg, "Turn On The Lights – Please: A Message to Organizations of Rio +20 Environmental Summit: Poverty Pollutes," *Newsweek*, June 4 & 11, 2012, 41.

⁴⁵For more detail, see Bjorn Lomborg, "Turn On The Lights – Please," 38-43.

of Vatican II needs to keep up the momentum of creating more space for the many centres of a polycentric Church to carve out a future where there are more inculturated local Churches. The breath of fresh air during Vatican II, even though it occurred only after an historical temporal period of 15 centuries, offers hope (albeit against hope) that the jubilation of springtime almost always succeeds the dormancy of winter.