

**TOWARD A PARADIGM SHIFT IN
MISSION AMONGST THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
IN ASIA**

by
JOJO M. FUNG, S.J.

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Summary

In this article, Malaysian Jojo Fung reflects out of his experience of ministry among indigenous peoples in his home country, in order to propose several theological principles, and several models for faithful and effective missionary work. Father Fung's theological principles are the goodness of creation, the cultural reality of Jesus' ministry, the reality of the Incarnation, the power of the Resurrection, the presence of the Spirit, and the "principle of the Sound Tree." His models point to mission as a countercultural activity that calls for justice, a triple dialogue with culture, religious traditions and poverty, an attitude of openness to be evangelized by the culture to which one is sent (mission in reverse), and a patient, contemplative silence that witnesses to the integrity of the missionary. "The mission of the Church," he says, "is to collaborate with the God who precedes the Church, since God is already in mission among the indigenous peoples."

Introduction

In Asia, indigenous peoples are still being perceived as objects of charity and welfare development programs of the Church-related and service-oriented organizations. Insufficient attempts have been undertaken to enable them to empower themselves in order to become active and critical protagonists of their own destiny. Such an ecclesial orientation in relation to indigenous peoples has betrayed an outmoded mission theology or theology of mission. As the Church Universal enters into the third millennium, the need to rethink missiology is all the more urgent, if the Church is to enter into solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Asia in their life-struggle.

The United Nations designated 1993 as the International Year of Indigenous Peoples. It was indeed a watershed event in the global history. Based on the presupposition that the primal religions are revelatory of God's salvific presence, I intend to examine the theological development of the Asian Church subsequent to this historic event. Much as been written about indigenous shamanism, but I will explain it as the symbolic core of indigenous cultures. The theoretical explanation will be supplemented by a personal experience of two shamanic rituals. Certain criteria, including theological principles, will be generated to revalue and evaluate indigenous cultures, especially indigenous shamanism. Finally, I will propose four missiological models for effective collaborative ministry between the indigenous peoples and the Church.

I. Changing Theological Landscape in Asia

Since the watershed event of 1993, there has been a noticeable shift in the theological focus and concern of the Asian church with regard to the indigenous peoples. In September, 1995, the Office of Evangelization of the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) organized a conference in Hua Hin, Thailand, entitled *Evangelization Among The Indigenous Peoples Of Asia*. The forty-five participants, bishops, priests, religious and lay

people of Asia, all of whom belonged to indigenous groups, or were working with them, reflected on the theological significance of the religious heritage of the indigenous peoples. They affirmed that "over the centuries God has been speaking to indigenous peoples through their cultures" (Eilers, ed. 1997: 212). For the first time there was an open admission that the Christian Churches in Asia have unjustly treated the religious traditions and practices, and marginalized their adherents within the Church. The participants called for "a new evangelization at the heart of these cultures, a profound encounter between the core values of indigenous peoples and the biblical faith" (*ibid.*). They recommended that "the Church should support the *right of indigenous peoples to exist and to be themselves*", and promised to "stand with them in their struggle to live as full and equal citizens of their nations and to enter the mainstream without losing their identity" (*ibid.*: 212-213). Participants advocated for a more prophetic Asian Church "we must *oppose laws that oppress and discriminate* against indigenous peoples, and educate people concerning their land rights. We must develop indigenous leaders equipped to work for their people's rights, particularly in regard to the land. When necessary, Christians must lobby governments and create public opinion in favor of the rights of indigenous peoples" (*ibid.*). The Church needs to provide formal and non-formal, vocational and professional, education suited to the actual needs of the indigenous peoples, aimed at overcoming illiteracy, and succeeding in the wider culture. More so, education has to "instill a sense of responsibility in educated indigenous peoples so that they do not use the tools of education to oppress their own people" (*ibid.*). Moreover, indigenous peoples must be made aware, through social and cultural analysis, "where they are, how and why they have reached this point; and are thus able to appropriate their culture critically, and decide their future" (*ibid.*). Participants acknowledged, "we need to promote a *deeper knowledge* of indigenous peoples and their history," to be fostered "among the indigenous peoples themselves and among majority groups, so that all become aware of the indigenous peoples' identity and their contributions to society" (*ibid.*). This knowledge is accumulated through "*collecting and studying* our peoples' myths,

rites, symbols, poems, and proverbs," which could be used to promote a genuine prayer life and worship among indigenous peoples" (*ibid.*).

In 1997, the FABC Office of Theological Concerns called for a theological paradigm shift in the Church's perception of the indigenous peoples. This theological shift is evident in the document entitled *The Spirit At Work In Asia Today (FABC Papers 1998)*. The strengths of this document are manifold. First, it made a critical appraisal of the situation of the indigenous peoples in Asia.

In many Asian societies the adherents of the primal religions are not only numerically minorities but are considered to be culturally inferior, less developed; and practices are deemed to be of less value. Indigenous peoples are often referred to as tribals and aborigines, terms they reject as perpetuating stereotypes depicting them as backward. In various Asian countries the adherents of primal religions are living in remote areas, isolated from the urban centers. As regards their possibilities of having access to education and participation in the economic processes these people are marginalized and disadvantaged. In most Asian countries the growing industrialization and urbanization, coupled with exploitation of the natural resources in mining and ecological destruction of local forests, seas and wildlife, threaten the existence and livelihood of indigenous peoples who are used to traditional ways of life based on symbolic relationships with nature (*ibid.: No. 23*).

Second, the document pointed out the antiquated mission theology underlying the missionary practices, which regard their leaders and adherents to "have been under the influence of evil spirits rather than under the influence of the Holy Spirit." Even worse, the document adds:

The primal religions were often accused of propagating

idolatrous and satanic practices. Their members were called people living in "darkness and far from God," because they were considered to believe in a world full of evil spirits and powers, and to depend on the intercession of dubious magicians, witch-doctors, healers and exorcists. The Christian message was presented to them as the liberating force, which, with the power of the Holy Spirit, brought light into the darkness and delivered these people from an age-old oppression and slavery to religiously false ideas, which could only be called superstitious and idolatrous (*ibid.*: No. 26).

Third, the document calls for a rethinking of missiological approaches, so that the Asian Church should not only "evangelize the indigenous peoples but must be evangelized by them, and learn from them new insights, in areas such as ecology, community life and the celebration of life's joys and tragedies" (*ibid.*). Since the cultures of the indigenous peoples have been recognized as the *locus* of God's self-communication, the document postulates that "much of the indigenous peoples' world view and ethos is compatible with the Christian faith" (*ibid.*). Therefore, their "traditional beliefs, rites, myths and symbols of indigenous peoples provide material for developing indigenous theologies and liturgical ceremonies" (*ibid.*).

This paradigm shift provides the Church with a timely opportunity for a deeper understanding of the indigenous cultures, especially one of its core institutional cultural practices, known as indigenous shamanism.

II. Indigenous Shamanism

Much anthropological research has been generated with regard to indigenous shamanism. My own interactive field research since 1997 has also led me to focus more on indigenous shamanism, or the shamanistic traditions of the *Orang Asli* of West Malaysia and the *Muruts* of Sabah, East Malaysia. The former (literally translated as "original people") boasts of nineteen linguistic

groups, and number about 105,000. The latter, (literally, "hill people"), are the third largest indigenous tribe in Sabah (after the Kadazandusuns and Bajaus). The 1991 census indicated that there are 54,037 Muruts in Sabah, with about ninety percent concentrated in the southwestern part of Sabah (formerly British North Borneo).

From the onset, it is important to state that the intercultural dialogue with indigenous peoples must examine the indigenous institution of shamanism, as it is inseparably linked with the shamans and their initiation rites, their indigenous cosmology and mythology, the rituals that they perform, and the accompanying signs and symbols. It is a whole system, i.e., without the shamans and the rituals, there will be no shamanism, and vice versa. Therefore, E. Jean Matteson Langdon contends that "shamanism is an enduring institution that must be comprehended holistically" (Landon 1992: 20).

Anthropological understanding of indigenous shamanism varies, ranging from an institution and a system, to that of a phenomenon. Mircea Eliade describes shamanism as the "most archaic and most widely distributed occult traditions" (Eliade 1967: 56 quoted in Overton 1998: 27). Sandy Yule argues that "shamanism comes from the Tunguso-Manchurian word 'saman.' The noun is formed from the verb 'sa-' ('to know'); thus, 'shaman' literally means 'he (sic) who knows'" (Yule 1999: 45). James A. Overton opines that "throughout most of the world (North and South America, Asia, Europe and Oceania), the shaman fulfils, or has fulfilled in the past, the roles of healer, master of the spirits, guardian of the psychic and ecologic well-being of his community, psychopomp, and intermediary between the natural and supernatural" (Overton 1998: 27).

According to Ulla Johansen, "shamanism is not a religion.... but a phenomenon — namely, the activities of shamans — that can be found in various religions" (Johansen 1999): 41). Langdon qualifies Johansen by viewing "shamanism as a globalizing and dynamic social and cultural phenomenon" (Landon 1992: 4). He

further adds that "South American shamanism is a religious system. It contains ideas and practices about the world and its reproduction, the worldview and reflection of the world"; and therefore, "ritual is an important and necessary expression of a belief system.... Ritual works because it expresses. Its efficacy lies in its power as metaphor to express and alter the human experience by altering perception" (*ibid.*: 11-12). Langdon believes that "the shaman is central in ritual expression, since he is the master of the ritual and its representations. His authority to conduct ritual comes from his position as mediator between various domains and the superhuman, the natural and the cultural. He is an ambiguous or liminal figure. He is both animal and human, since he transforms into animals. He is neither inherently good nor evil, because he works for the benefit, as well as the misfortune, of others. His power derives in part from his ambiguity, since he does not fit into the mutually-exclusive category that organized the world" (*ibid.*: 12).

Seen from the viewpoint of power, Landon explains the shaman as the "possessor of power, and it is power that enables him to mediate between the extrahuman and human. This concept of power is intimately linked to the idea of energy forces, the manifestation of these forces in the soul, and the growth and development of humans"; as "manifested as light or aura.... in songs"; for "the shaman's power interacts with the global energy system" (*ibid.* 14). Indeed, the shamans have the ability to draw upon "this energy through the ecstatic experience, through dreams or through trances induced by drugs" (*ibid.*: 20). I fully subscribe to Langdon's notion that "the sources of the shaman's power are the sources of culture itself; and the knowledge he acquires is culture's content. Through ritual he is central to the expression of the cultural system. His role as mediator extends into the sociological domain, where he plays an important role in curing, as well as in economic, political, and other activities" (*ibid.*). In view of this, I contend that a shaman derives his power by virtue of the fact that he is an existential embodiment, and symbolic expression and content of the shaman's culture (see Fung 2000).

Sue Jennings discovers that the Temiars of Peninsular Malaysia call their shamans *halak*; though occasionally the Malay word *bomoh* or *pawang* is used. *Halak* "also describes the potential for being a shaman and the meeting of an individual with a person's spirit-guide in dreams. Although most *halak* are male, there are women as well. Robert Dentan remarks that "there are varying degrees of *halak*. Women are rarely more than just a little *halak*; but a really *halak* woman is more successful than most male *halak* in the diagnosis and cure of diseases" (Dentan 1968: 85, quoted in Jennings 1995: 138). However, the majority of the shamans, who are known as *bobolizans* among the Rungus and Kadazandusuns of Sabah, are women. So too, their apprentices. Both George N. Appell and Laura W. R. Appell consider *bobolizans* "as an intermediary between human beings and supernatural beings, both upperworld *osunduw* and the terrestrial *rogon*, to alleviate afflictions of disease, misfortune, and crop failure.... They go into trance to communicate with the spirit world in order to diagnose and cure illness and misfortune; and they then sing the long sacred texts that accompany the necessary sacrificial offerings to the spirit world" (Appell and Appell 1993: 1920). As a result, "women are considered the authorities on the nature of the cosmos and are the interpreters of most forms of misfortune, except those relating to farming activities, where there are male experts as well" (*ibid.*: 20). The *bobolizans* effect cures through the help of the *luma'ag*, who are the spirit and the "celestial counterpart of a living individual, male or female," and sometimes "of her mother or teacher" which they call upon during trance (*ibid.*: 14). The *luma'ag* communicates to the *bobolizans* "information on the proper sacrifice to achieve cures, which then involve the performance of hymns to the gods and spirits over sacrifices of pigs and chickens" (*ibid.*).

The Temiar believe that shamans are persons of knowledge and wisdom. They are divided into minor, middle and major shamans, even a fourth category, great shaman, to indicate the highest grade of shaman, who are tiger shamans, of whom there are very few at any one time (Jennings 1995: 139). Most shamans begin as "minor shaman, following the guidance of dream

revelation; spirit guides of *off-the-ground* species. Higher grades of shaman have spirit-guides from *on-the-ground* species. It is the major and great shaman that are able to accept power, not just from the head-souls of *off-the-ground* and *ground* species, but also from the heart/blood-soul, the lower body soul, of species *on-the-ground*" (*ibid.*: 140). Finally, shamans perform rituals because of "soul-sickness: either head-soul sickness or blood/heart-soul sickness" (*ibid.*: 151). It is not uncommon that shamans "also give amulets made from wild garlic, which are tied round the neck or wrist to ward off malevolent spirits or prevent colds and chills. If an infant is unwell, the baby and its mother will wear an amulet" (*ibid.*: 145).

In the encounter with the world of shamanism, most participants with a rational (more impacted by scientific and technocratic) mindset, normally doubt and dismiss what they witness and experience as unreal. Overton advocates the change of mindset, which involves what he calls *shamanic realism*. He defines it as "the realistic presentation of an esoteric worldview, which is not the result of the imagination of the author, but principally of a system of beliefs of ethnographic origins. Shamanic realism, therefore, transcends, as does shamanism itself, the barriers of history and geography, and therefore of the Latin American continent and of the Spanish language or of its literary tradition" (Overton 1998: 25). He concludes that shamanic realism is the "result of the presence of a system of cultural beliefs whose indelible influence on the author becomes patent in his or her artistic representation" (*ibid.*: 53). Only shamanic realism enables participants to put on a shamanic perspective, which disposes them toward the experience of shamanic rituals, and better to understand indigenous shamanism. Indeed, what is experienced is real, out there, before one's very eyes, and all one can say is, "It is what it is."

With this theoretical explanation of indigenous shamanism and shamans, I would like to narrate a personal experience of two shamanic rituals, in which I participated upon the invitation of friends who are indigenous persons.

III. Personal Shamanic Experience

My field research on indigenous shamanism has enabled me humbly to acknowledge its positive values, without lending myself to an uncritical romanticization of this indigenous practice. Over the years, my understanding has since deepened, since I participated in the healing rituals of the *Orang Asli*, and befriended a few Murut shamans in Sabah. I am of the opinion that to interact and learn from the shamans is to allow the indigenous peoples to trust us enough to invite us to step into their worlds. I believe it is important to savor their shamanic world, because it constitutes the deepest symbolic core of their cultures.

The healing ritual I participated in is known as *sewang terang*. It was held in a Semai village, which lasted for four days, beginning at ten at night, and lasting until five in the morning, at dawn. *Sewang terang* is a healing ritual, conducted with lights switched on in the house—hence the word *terang*, which means bright. There is another healing ritual conducted in the dark, known as *sewang gelap*.

In the ritual I attended, I witnessed a team of three elderly shamans, two men and a woman, one acting as the chief shaman, assisted by a woman and another man. Shamans are extraordinary and ordinary members of the community. They are extraordinary because they have the capacity to perceive and maneuver the different worlds—animal, human, spirit—in the same healing ritual. As they traverse in luminosity, they mediate the powers from the different worlds, to bring about healing to the sick of the community. Yet, they are as ordinary as any other villager, because they have to work in the field to earn their living. They have taught me the meaning of "taking off my shoes," and leaving behind my ethnocentric and religious prejudices and biases about their cultures and belief-systems. At the same time, they have encouraged me to "walk barefoot" into the holy sanctuary of their healing rituals.

My second experience happened in early 1999. At that time I

participated in a ritual commemorating the hundred days after the burial of a deceased, person in a Murut Village on the Kalimantan side of the border of Sabah. In honor of the wish of the late father, the son built a traditional bamboo house, with a springboard located in the middle of the house. This springboard, which the Muruts called "*papan tinago*," is made of wooden planks, fastened to logs arranged beneath the board; and they act like springs. These logs give the "*papan tinago*" a bouncy effect, as the Muruts perform their rituals on it. An elderly shaman was called upon to inaugurate the "*papan tinago*." He and a group of middle-aged Muruts women and men chanted the benediction, and performed the traditional dance, moving gracefully across the "*papan tinago*," as the rest of the villagers witnessed the event; and many joined in the benediction as they chanted along in intervals.

As I sat there and participated in their rituals, I was able to gradually "take off" my curiosity and "put on" the "shamanic perspective," which enabled me to learn to "see as they see, hear as they hear, understand as they understand," not always clearly, but in glimpses. Only in this way, gradual though the process is, I have come to participate in the "shamanic realism" of the seamless world mediated to me by the shamans. No longer do I ask the bivalent question, so typical of a Euro-American mindset (a mindset in which I was educated), traceable to a positivistic rationality, "Is this real or false?" Rather I find myself exclaiming, in child-like awe, simplicity and wonder: "This is it! This is as real as it can get! I am actually there! I am in!" Attending these healing rituals has humbled me; for the sacredness of the ambience bespeaks to me of a *presence* which has already preceded me; as *it is* the overshadowing presence of the Divine Mystery. The cultures of the indigenous peoples, in addition to being the loci of God's speech, are the "sacred tabernacles"; where God has chosen to dwell amongst a marginal people, the way God did in the cloud and the pillar of fire during the sojourn of the oppressed Israelites during their exodus from Egypt.

The aim of this narration of a personal shamanic experience is to foreground the importance of critical reflection on personal

experience in the light of theoretical knowledge, with the hope of generating relevant criteria for revaluing and evaluating indigenous cultures.

IV. Criteria Of Re-evaluation and Evaluation

Before discussing the criteria for re-evaluation and evaluation, it is important to note that the Church since Vatican II has sincerely acknowledged the positive values in the other religious traditions (see, e.g., AG 3, 7, 9, 11; LG 16, 17; GS 22; RM 5, 10, 28, as well as many of the documents of the FABC [Rosales and Arévalo, eds. 1992; Eilers, ed., 1997]). More so, when it comes to the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, which unequivocally affirms the revelatory and salvific character of the other religions.

The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions, and by following the dictates of their conscience, that the members of other *world and primal* religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ; even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour (DP 29 – my emphasis).

Given this positive ecclesial evaluation, it is thus necessary that some criteria be formulated, so as to facilitate the mutual enrichment and critique between the Christian message and the indigenous cultures.

The reflection above on my personal experience convinced me of the primacy of *kenosis* and *pleroma*, as the *conditio sine qua non* of any kind of evangelization activity. This criterion calls for an accompanying period of insertion and immersion amongst the indigenous peoples. Only this insertion facilitates the process of self-emptying that allows the indigenous cultures, especially, their ritualistic celebration, to enrich and evangelize

us. Given these lived experiences, there has to be a subsequent process of an ongoing critical reflection on the lived experiences. The presence of such reflection will lend the generated criteria an aura of authenticity for revaluing and evaluating the cultures of the indigenous peoples.

My conversation with different persons (priests, *Orang Asli* Catholics) has enabled me to discover three helpful and useful criteria for the revaluation and evaluation of indigenous cultural symbols.

(a) *Indigenous Power of Distinction*. Any effective revaluation or evaluation needs to engage the wisdom embedded in indigenous epistemology, especially its capacity to make a moral distinction between what is a "service" and "disservice" to the indigenous community. The cultural nuances may differ geographically, but the moral service or disservice is well understood by indigenous peoples.

In Chicago, I met a Claretian priest from Guatemala who offered an "emic" distinction between "white magic" and "black magic." The practitioners of these two kinds of magic differ significantly. The former never asks for a fee but a token (such as tobacco and some coins will suffice); the latter always negotiates the fee before the ritual. In a Native American healing ceremony that I participated in, I witnessed a token offering of tobacco, given to the shaman and his assistant.

A Malaysian indigenous woman activist does not speak in terms of magic, but rather of *ilmu putih* (literally: "white knowledge/ science"), and *ilmu hitam* (literally: black knowledge/ science"). *Ilmu* refers to a corpus of indigenous knowledge which constitutes an indigenous science, for example, in the fields of shamanism and biodiversity. *Ilmu putih* is used by their shamans to bring about the general health of the community, and healing of individual sick persons in the village. Shamans who render moral service to the community are well received in the village; and interestingly, they actually live in the midst of the villagers. However,

those who use *ilmu itam* are feared and shunned by the villagers. Their homes are away from the village, usually on the fringe, or near to the forest.

In my conversation with the son of a renowned Murut shaman, he told me frankly that his father does not involve himself with *Setan* (satan). He qualified his father's shamanic practice as *bagus* ("good") as opposed to *jahat* ("wicked"). In fact, the son used the Malay phrase "*Dia punya baik bukan jahat*," which means "the power he uses is good, and not evil or satanic." He reiterated that his father employs shamanic power only to bring healing to those who request his services. A shaman who healed my niece categorically stated that he heals with the power that comes from Jesus.

An indigenous couple matter-of-factly told me that the good spirits "are relatives of Jesus"; and "they are created by God" to become helpers of humankind to bring healing to the sick. Such spirits need to be discerned and tested against the moral life and history of the shamans, and their contribution to the common good of the community. (In regard to these examples, I am grateful for a dialogue with Methodist pastors and lay leaders in Cameron in March 2001).

(b) *Rite of passage as sacred*. All rituals associated with the indigenous rites of passage, considered sacrosanct by the community, must be valued *in themselves*. At the White River Apache Reservation in Northern Arizona, a Franciscan priest explained to me about the sacredness of the puberty initiation rite for all the Apache teenage girls. Every year, he joined in the celebration as a witness. The Apache shamans perform the ritual. As a Franciscan priest, he comes in to minister a blessing at the end, when the Catholic parents request him to do so. A Malaysian diocesan priest also explained to me that he gladly participates in the burial and wedding ceremonies of the indigenous peoples. At an appropriate time deemed necessary by the members (family and/or community), he performs the Catholic rituals. Both of these priests impressed me as persons who so value the indigenous cultures that they regard their rituals as sacred. Atti-

tudes of profound sensitivity and respect have enabled them to appreciate and value the indigenous rituals in themselves, i.e., *on their terms not ours*. This reverence has enabled both to refrain from superseding or superimposing Christianity on their indigenous practices.

(c) *Rituals effect changes*. Indigenous rituals must be valued in terms of the intended consequences. I learnt this from a Nigerian professor who is a Catholic. I first met him at the anthropology department of the University of California, Berkeley. In relation to indigenous rituals, he explained to me that one of the most relevant criteria for him *is that it works*. This means that it brings about the desired effects — for instance, sick persons are cured and restored to the fullness of health. In fact, I recently met one of the patients who participated in the aforementioned healing ritual of *sewang terang*. She told me that since taking part in the healing ritual, she has been healed.

These are three criteria I would like to propose for revaluing and evaluating indigenous cultural symbols *in themselves*. Besides, I postulate that the Church needs to establish biblically-based theological principles for understanding indigenous cultural symbols and practices.

V. Theological Principles

Five biblically-based principles will be elaborated as a conceptual framework for a reconsideration of indigenous cultures. They are principles in relation to creation, Christ, the incarnation, the resurrection and the Spirit. The last principle of the sound tree is an illustration of the difference in the perception and subsequent explanation of indigenous practices in the light of such principles and conceptual framework.

(a) *Principle of Creation*. The creation account reminds us that everything God has created "is good and graced with God's presence" (Gen 1:4,10,12,18, 21,25). After the creation of humankind in God's image and likeness, "God saw everything that God

had made and indeed, it was very good." (Gen 1:31) All the different spirits in the universe whom the shamans invoke to bring healing to the sick are part of God's creation too. This is not to ignore the fact that there are evil spirits used by ill-intentioned shamans, upon the requests of persons with evil intentions. But it must be affirmed and asserted that creation has its origin in the creative act of God. The presence of evil is never connected with Genesis 1, as with Genesis 3. As Kathleen Coyle contends:

the myth traces the origin of evil not to creation *but to an ancestor of the human race*. The origin of evil is not woven into the fabric of being, for creation is good, not evil. Nor is evil older than creation, nor contemporary with the origin of things. Evil is the corruption that occurs within a creation.... the myth posits the beginning of evil as distinct from the beginning of creation that is *already* complete and good. The myth of Genesis 3 also reveals the mysterious aspect of evil, namely, that before we initiate or commit evil we discover it already there. We do not begin evil; we continue it. It has its own history, its own past, before we ever become implicated in it. As human beings, we are destined for the good and inclined to evil: "in this paradox of 'destination' and 'inclination' the whole meaning of the symbol of the Fall is concentrated. Sin is a reality antecedent to every awakening of consciousness; it has a communal dimension that cannot be reduced to individual responsibility; and it is a power that binds us and holds us captive" (Coyle 1990: 289, quoting Ricoeur 1974: 284).

At this juncture, it is worthwhile considering the account of physical healing in the book of Tobit (11: 5-17). Raphael said to Tobit, "You must put the fish's gall to his (Tobias, Tobit's father) eyes; the medicine will smart and will draw a filmy white skin off his eyes. And your father will be able to see and look on the light." Tobias came on towards him (he had the fish's gall in his hand). He blew into his eyes and said, steadying him, "Take courage, father!" With this he applied the medicine, left there a while; then

with both hands peeled away a filmy skin from the corner of his eyes. Then his father fell on his neck and wept. He exclaimed, "I can see, my son, the light of my eyes!" From a shamanic perspective, this account bespeaks of a shamanic ritual of healing. The shamanic power comes from outside of Tobit, symbolized by Raphael. The power is meditated through the use of a fish's gall. Once administered, healing takes place. Is there a possibility that Tobit exercised a kind of ancient Hebrew shamanic ritual of healing, which was familiar to him by virtue of the process of acculturation?

(b) *Christological Principle.* God has come *in person* to bring healing to the world. Jesus is the divine-human embodiment of God. In healing a blind man at Bethsaida (Jn 9:1-7; also see Mk 8:22), Jesus "spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash yourself in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see" (v.7). From a shamanic perspective, the use of mud and saliva reminds us of some of the things shamans do during the healing rituals. Though not exactly in the same manner, some shamans actually suck water into the mouth and spread the water onto the sick. In this account, Jesus' mediatory role qualifies him to be the salvific intermediary between the God-world and the human world of the sick. More than that, Jesus can be seen as the existential embodiment and symbolic expression of the power of God. As a mediatory symbol, little wonder Jesus remarked "that someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me" (Lk 8: 46). In the light of this explanation, can Jesus be construed as a shaman? Can he be said to have practiced an ancient form of Nazarene shamanism?

(d) *Principle of Incarnation.* God has created all persons and things good, and they are pleasing in God's sight. In Jesus, God has come *personally* to affirm that goodness in persons and the world. Through the incarnation God has restored wholeness to human beings and society, so that abundant or fullness of life means good health, justice and peace in society, harmony between creation/environment/nature and humankind. God has done it

through many persons (prophets, priests, Jesus and the apostles). God's presence continues through the abiding presence of God's Spirit. Pentecost can be understood as God's *pneumatological incarnation* in the world. The world, including indigenous shamanism (with its shamanic knowledge of the many worlds) is "shot through" with God's pneumatological presence. All spirits are under the influence of God's abiding Spirit, except for those spirits which continue the history of sin through the mediation of ill-intentioned shamans. God, who once was God-in-person and now is God-with-us-in-Spirit, can continue God's salvific mission through many other persons today, including the shamans, to bring bodily healing, to cast out evil spirit, and restore fullness and wholeness of life to creation and humankind.

(e) *Principle of Resurrection.* The forces of evil and structural injustices (social sins and personal sins) can never abort (let alone bury) God's effort to bring about wholeness and fullness of life to creation and humankind. The Cross points away from itself, always forward, to the God *who lives on and beyond* every conceivable conniving plot and lustful power-struggle of wicked humankind. The empty tomb points to a God who triumphs over the forces of death, defeating the power of the all-evil spirits in the world. The resurrection of Jesus is God's victorious power over the death-dealing forces. Through the insurmountable power of God, God has broken *down* the walls of human conspiracy and broken Godself free from all the entombing forces. The God who has risen now becomes the life-giving Risen Lord who is at liberty to use any religious system to bring God's healing, reconciliation, justice and peace. God who is above the monopoly of any one religious system is at full liberty to choose anyone of them, even indigenous shamanism, to be the salvific means of healing and reconciliation in the world.

(f) *Principle of Pneuma.* All of creation is filled with God's Spirit. God's Spirit is life-giving and life-sustaining. The *Pneuma* recreates the primal chaos, and creation, to bring forth orderliness and splendor. The *Pneuma* has been a creative agent of God, from creation to incarnation and Pentecost and thereon. The

Pneuma continues to be God's creative agent in and through the many diverse religious systems in the world today. Can God not employ the *Pneuma* as God's salvific agent to bring about a "new creation" between the sick and the many worlds through indigenous shamanism? Especially by restoring a sense of balance, interconnectedness and harmony between the animal world, plant world, human world and the spirit world? Can we actually deny God's *Pneuma* a creative role in and through indigenous shamanism and shamans?

(g) *Principle of Sound Tree*. Based on the five principles, the Church needs to recognize that indigenous shamanism is a part of God's creation and therefore salvific, since it is inseparable from God's redemptive plan, that was already fulfilled in Jesus and now carried on by God's Spirit. Shamans who practice indigenous shamanism can be regarded as salvific symbols, especially when they are well-tested and attested members of the community, who practice what is honest and honorable to uphold the common good in the community. They are "like gold in a furnace," because they are like the sound trees that bear good fruits. Luke's Gospel reminds us that "no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good; and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks," the hands perform, the feet dance, the shaman heals and exorcises (Lk 6: 43-45). Is it not true that not everyone who cries out (Mt 7:21) "Lord, Lord" will enter into the Kingdom of God, but only those who do the will of my *Abba* in heaven"? Is it not interesting when John complained (Mk 9:38), "Master, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out devils in your name, and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him," Jesus protested vehemently (Mk 9:39-40), "you must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. *Anyone who is not against us is with us*"? Can we then conclude that shamans, who bring healing and restore wholeness of life to the sick through shamanic rituals, are doing the will of God? Since they are already in God's Kingdom?

With the explanation of the biblico-theological principles, I would now like to attempt to "generate" some missiological models for missions that enable the Church to respond to the shifting theological landscape of Asia and the cries of the indigenous peoples.

VII. Missiological Models

First, by way of an overview, let me examine the models of the past. Gideon C. Goosen, in his study of the cultural interface between Christianity and Australian Aborigines, discussed two missionary models (Goosen 199: 72-94). The first model used by the European missionaries was *total imposition*. The locals were regarded as *tabula rasa*—they were thought to have no beliefs in their cultures/lives. The aim was to make them Christians alienated from their milieu. When this failed, the *civilization model* was used instead. The motto then was *civilize and Christianize!* The locals have to become Europeans in order to become Christians. Oftentimes, the local indigenous peoples were made to despise their own culture, language and customs; and hence deny their identity (partial or outright).

With this short historical survey, I would like to propose four missiological models; namely; mission as countercultural; triple dialogue; reverse; and contemplative silence. Each of these models will be explained in relation to the indigenous peoples.

1. Mission as Countercultural

In a world where indigenous peoples are being exploited and manipulated, to act in solidarity with them in their struggle for cultural self-determination is itself countercultural. Such countercultural praxis disposes the Church to make a prophetic difference in a given society and culture.

In the Old Testament, amidst a nation plagued by injustice, the call of the prophets to practice justice and love is a call to be countercultural. This is demonstrated by Isaiah and Hosea who

challenged the Israelites to uphold a countercultural lifestyle: "Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Is 1: 16-17); "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hos 6: 6). Only a countercultural lifestyle is symbolic of the Israelites' covenantal fidelity to God.

The New Testament teaching of Jesus on mutual forgiveness in a culture with a vengeful spirit of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Mt 5: 39) is indeed countercultural. Matthew suggests to his community "to turn the other cheek" when one is struck. He further recommends, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5: 44). Matthew grounds such a countercultural behavior in the understanding of a magnanimous God "who makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteousness and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5: 45).

Jesus' unashamed and unperturbed association with sinners and tax collectors (Mt 9: 10-13, Mk 2: 15-17, Lk 15: 1-10) in the meal/table fellowship was a countercultural praxis which shattered the many oppressive boundaries that separated the "clean" from the "unclean". Even more radical was Jesus' highly countercultural and controversial declarations: "In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did" (Mt 21: 31). Jesus also praised the sacrifice and generosity of the poor widow over and above the surplus donation of the wealthy: "I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more than any of them; for these have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in all she had to live on" (Lk 21: 1-4).

In a Jewish culture which supports the erasure of the dignity and rights of women (who are not heard or seen), Jesus formed a countercultural community which allowed women to gain their rightful places and voices. He has allowed women to be his

disciples: "Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Sussana, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources" (Lk 8: 2-3). He forgave women their sins (even when she is caught in adultery) (Jn 8: 11), and allowed a woman who was a sinner to be publicly associated with him when she wiped his feet with her hair (Lk 7: 37-49).

In matters of faith and salvation, Jesus shattered his contemporary insular and exclusive mentality with his countercultural pronouncements. To the Roman centurion, he said: "In truth I tell you, nowhere in Israel have I found faith as great as this.... Go back, then: let this be done for you, as your faith demands" (Mt 8: 13). Then to the Syro-Phoenecian woman, he said, "For saying this you may go home happy; the devil has gone out of your daughter" (Mk 7: 29).

The countercultural model is relevant to the Church's mission in that it *re-presents* the radicality of Jesus' ministry in the Church's solidarity with the indigenous peoples. This model enjoins the Church to stand together with the indigenous peoples in their struggle to live as full and equal citizens, by shattering the many discriminatory and oppressive boundaries that continue to erase their cultural identity, repress their collective agency, and deny their concerted efforts aimed at self-determination.

2. Mission As Triple Dialogue

Asia prides itself on the plurality of primal and traditional religions, cultures and traditions. At the same time, the scandalous poverty suffered by the marginalized and oppressed in Asia is an affront to God. In this context, the Asian Bishops explain mission as a triple dialogue: with the poor, the different cultures, and religions (Synod 1999: No. 5).

In order to carry out its triple mission effectively among the indigenous peoples, the Church's first and foremost mission is to initiate a dialogue of life that fosters a sense of solidarity with

them. Only an abiding sense of solidarity will dispose the indigenous peoples to invest in a trusting relationship with the Church. This relationship becomes the basis by which they entrust their problems to the Church and call upon the Church to respond to their plight. It is expedient that the Church responds to their plight by deploying its resources, be it personnel or otherwise, that will facilitate the triple dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue with indigenous peoples of diverse cultures will certainly deepen the Church's understanding and appreciation of their aspirations, hopes, struggles, their traditional values, worldviews, beliefs, rites, myths, and cultural symbols. This familiarization with how indigenous peoples value their intimate connection between creation/nature and humankind, community life, the sharing of goods and services, the celebration of life's joys and tragedies, will enrich the life of the Church. At the same time, the Church will be challenged to promote these cultural values in a world so plagued by unbridled consumerism that has little regard for the environment and the marginalized. This enrichment will enable the Church, especially in its catechesis and liturgy and theology, to express the Christian message in and through the indigenous cultures. The openness and sensitivity shown by the Church will dispose it to engage itself in the struggle of the indigenous peoples to determine and promote their cultural identity and development.

Dialogue with the primal religions enables the Church to realize that the mystery of God is beyond the Church. God's Spirit is operative through indigenous shamanism to bring about wholeness of human life through the healing rituals for the sick. Indigenous shamans are the existential symbols of the continuity of their cultures and collective memory. The continuous practice of shamanism indicates the vibrancy of a cultural worldview which promotes the "many worlds" in the one creation of God, regarded as a "seamless whole" by indigenous cultures. This worldview is subverting the scientific worldview that the world is merely one-dimensional. The process of globalization, manipulated by neo-liberal capitalism, has lent impetus to this scientific rationality.

The globally-targeted efforts to collapse, and/or erase, the many cultural worldviews into one are being challenged and resisted by peoples of other cultures. As it stands, the dialectic tension is far from being resolved. In fact, the cultural battle between the "many into one" and the "many in one" will continue in the third millennium. (see Fung 2000: 192-193).

For reasons that the mystery of God is uniquely revealed in Christianity as *Abba* in the person of Jesus Christ, the dialogue with the primal religions need not neglect proclaiming that Jesus is the message and the agent of the message. In the words of Chito Tagle, "He is the message to be proclaimed; He is the Missioner *that must do the work* If Jesus is not the Message, if Jesus is not both the Message and the Missioner for us, then we might be betraying His being the Savior. For Him to be the Only Savior means He is not the Message but also the one who will do His mission" (quoted in Kroeger 1999: 94). Yet, this proclamation in Asia is unique. It calls for the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, *a proclamation through Christlike deeds*. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of others faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace.

The Church in Asia has realized that God is operative in the primal religions of the indigenous peoples too. Mission as triple dialogue will foster a richer exchange and relationship between the indigenous peoples and Church, which has never been envisaged before. This mission will enable the Church to become truly a Church *of* rather than merely *for* the indigenous peoples.

3. Mission in Reverse

When we allow ourselves to be evangelized by the indigenous peoples, mission in reverse occurs (see Bevans, Schreiter, Doidge, eds. 2000). In other words, the Church has much to receive from those among whom the Church is inserted. A genuine interaction will allow the indigenous peoples to help the Church to unlearn

its many cultural and theological biases about them.

Jesus too had to learn how to unlearn Himself. The account of a Syrophenician woman who begged Jesus to cast the demon of her daughter, his remark, "let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it the dogs" (Mk 7: 27), belies an age-old Jewish bias against the gentiles. The Jews in Jesus' time not only despised the gentiles but regarded them as outside of God's salvific plan. Her rebuttal truly shattered the boundary between the Jews and the gentiles, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (v.28). Her argument that all persons are saved by God, as both Jews and gentiles ate of the food from the table of God, won Jesus' heart. Jesus unlearned himself of an ethnocentric bias and acted upon her request, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter" (v.30).

Only when the Church is emptied of its biases and self-importance will it be able to receive not just the richness of their cultures but their constructive criticism as well. It is when the Church is enriched that it can enrich the indigenous peoples in return. When enriched, the Church will be in a better position to respond to their needs for the basic necessities of life; and, later on, for justice, peace and human rights.

This model is necessary for the Church to unlearn itself of its supposedly exclusive monopoly of God's salvific power and humbly learn that God is God of the Church and the indigenous peoples, who may not even be baptized members of the Church; but are already *in fellowship* with God in ways yet unknown to us but only known to God alone.

4. Mission As Contemplative Silence

The Church enjoys a rich tradition of contemplative silence. Likewise, indigenous peoples value solitude as a means of deepening their communion with the many worlds within their worldview.

John Paul II underlines this mission in the document *Ecclesia In Asia*. He believes that "mission is contemplative action and active contemplation," because in Asia, "home to the great religions where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual, even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns" (EIA 1999: No.23, 68). In many countries, contemplative silence is the only missionary option, because explicit celebration of the Christian faith is forbidden, due to a dire lack of religious tolerance. In such an environment, "the Church realizes that the silent witness of life still remains the only way of proclaiming God's Kingdom" (*ibid.*: No.71).

Cardinal Julius R. Darmaatmaja, President Delegate of the 1999 Asian Synod in Rome, underlined this model of mission as contemplative silence:

In Asia, the medium of approaching the Absolute or Divine is not word but silence. For Asians, Christ is most suitably made known personally, through human experiences more than through academics. The most effective and credible proclamation of the Risen Lord is the unspoken witness of a person who has undergone a deep God-experience; and whose life is transformed accordingly. The credibility of the evangelizer lies in his/her being a wo/man of God more than a scholar; in being a person who lives simply but with depth; a spiritual person rather than an expert in the field of development (Darmaatmaja 1998: 9).

This model introduces the Church to the core of the mystery of God's mission in relation to the world. Much of God's mission is known, and yet unknown, to the Church. Yet, only in contemplative silence is the Church privileged with a glimpse of God's universal inclusiveness of God's people, who are steeped in their indigenous cultures and cultural practices, such as indigenous shamanism. Hopefully the Church will be able to grasp a part of God's "veiled" mission amongst the indigenous peoples of our times.

Conclusion

This continuous effort of rethinking the mission of the Asian Church in relation to the indigenous peoples is necessary in the new millennium, to enable the Church to enter into an effective collaborative ministry with the indigenous peoples. The noticeable changes in the theological landscape signify an inherent paradigm shift in missiology. This shift calls for a deeper study of indigenous cultures, especially the practice of indigenous shamanism. Anthropological findings enable the Church to discern further, and to acknowledge that indigenous shamanism is truly the *locus* where God's salvific actions are operative for the general well-being of the indigenous communities, humankind, and creation as a whole.

With God's salvific actions operative in indigenous cultures, the Church needs to honor the indigenous capacity for epistemological differentiation; and to consider the rites of passage as effective and sacred *in themselves*. The theological principles related to creation, the Christ-event and the *Pneuma* challenge the Church to accord greater credence to the practice of indigenous shamanism and shamans. The indigenous logic of "many in the one", as opposed to the rationality of "many into one," underlines the theological understanding that God is the God of all, over all and through all, because God who is Spirit is omnipresent in all cultures and the many worlds, in the one seamless Creation.

The four ensuing mission models call upon the Church to be effective means of God's universal plan of salvation for indigenous peoples around the world. A Church that engages itself in mission, understood as a triple dialogue, mission in reverse, and contemplative silence enables the Church to be countercultural in the context of the many poor, the diverse cultures, and different religions of Asia. In other words, to be a countercultural agent, the Church needs to engage in the triple dialogue that allows its cultural and theological ethnocentricity to be critiqued and shattered by indigenous peoples. At the same time, the Church learns from indigenous peoples how to be of service to them, so as to

empower them to engage effectively in their own struggle for self-determination. Ultimately, this countercultural mission allows Jesus to carry out his prophetic mission through the Church in our times, a mission that is carried out through contemplated actions and contemplative silence.

In this way, the diverse indigenous cultures in Asia are truly the *loci* of God's self-communication and salvific actions in the world. The mission of the Church is to collaborate with the God who precedes the Church, since God is already *in mission* among the indigenous peoples.

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