

RECEPTION OF AND TRAJECTORIES FOR VATICAN II IN ASIA

PETER C. PHAN

The article offers a historical analysis of the impact of Vatican II on the Asian Catholic churches. It places this reception of the council within the various contexts of Asia and Asian Christianity and argues that this reception includes an expansion of the council's trajectories insofar as Asian Catholicism, led by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, carries out the council's renewal agenda to respond to the internal and external challenges facing the Asian Catholic churches in the last five decades.

THE FOCUS OF THIS ARTICLE is quite precise and narrow: the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the Asian churches or, stated positively from the perspective of the Asian churches, their “reception” of Vatican II since its convocation five decades ago. It is not a historical study of the contributions of the Asian churches to the council as such.¹ Nor does it treat of the theoretical issues such as the principles that should guide the

PETER C. PHAN received the STD from the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome, and the PhD and DD from the University of London. He currently holds the Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University. Specializing in systematic theology, inculturation, and religious pluralism, he has recently published *Christianities in Asia* (2011) and edited and introduced *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (2012). Another monograph entitled “Catholic Christianities of Asia: History of Theology” is in progress.

¹ A comprehensive and critical historical study of the contributions of the bishops of Asia to Vatican II during the antepreparatory, preparatory, and conciliar periods is still to be written. The celebrated five-volume *Storia del concilio Vaticano II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995–2001), ET, *History of Vatican II*, ed. Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996–2006) provides only sketchy information on this subject. This study is now made easier by the publication of all the official documents of the council: *Acta et documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando: Series I—Antepreparatoria* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1960–1961); *Series II—Praepreparatoria* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1964–1994); *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticano II* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970–1999). For a brief survey of the presence and contributions of the bishops of Asia at Vatican II, see Peter C. Phan, “‘Reception’ or ‘Subversion’ of Vatican II by the Asian Churches? A New Way of Being Church in Asia,” in *Vatican II: Forty Years Later*, ed. William Madges (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005) 26–32.

interpretation of Vatican II as an “event” and of its 16 documents,² the various “narratives” of the council,³ and the “rupture/discontinuity” and/or “reform/continuity” between the council and the alleged “pre-Vatican II church.”⁴ Rather, it is intended as a companion piece to the surveys of the reception of Vatican II in Latin America and Africa.⁵

A few preliminary remarks are in order before undertaking the proposed assessment. First, by “Vatican II” is meant the council itself and its 16 documents. However, since Vatican II could not, of course, implement its own reform programs and even called for the establishment of post-conciliar commissions to carry out its reform policies, it is reasonable that, in assessing the impact of Vatican II, attention should be paid to the major postconciliar documents, institutions, and, indeed, to the pontificates of Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI.⁶

Second, “reception” refers to the ongoing process by which the community of faith, with its *sensus fidei/fidelium*, makes a teaching or a practice of the faith its own, acknowledging thereby that it is a true and authentic expression of the church’s faith. Reception is not to be understood as a juridical ratification by the community of such a teaching or practice whose truth and validity would derive from such ratification. Rather, it is an act whereby the community affirms and attests that such teaching or

² On the hermeneutics of Vatican II, see the magnificent articles celebrating the 50th anniversary of the council in the pages of this journal: John O’Malley, S.J., “‘The Hermeneutics of Reform’: A Historical Analysis,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 517–46; and Ormond Rush, “Toward a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and Its Documents,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 547–69.

³ On the three “narratives”—ultratraditionalist, ultraliberal, and neoconservative—of the council, see Massimo Faggioli, “Vatican II: The History and the Narratives,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 749–67.

⁴ On the debate over the “continuity” and “discontinuity” of Vatican II, see Gerald O’Collins, S.J., “Does Vatican II Represent Continuity or Discontinuity?” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 768–94.

⁵ See O. Ernesto Valiente, “The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 795–823; and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., “‘After All, Africa Is Largely a Nonliterate Continent’: The Reception of Vatican II in Africa” in this issue. A decade ago I published an essay titled “Reception of Vatican II in Asia: Historical and Theological Analysis,” *Gregorianum* 83 (2002) 269–85. This article assumes and extends the research presented in that essay by focusing on the reception of Vatican II by the Asian churches in the last ten years.

⁶ Note that the issue here is not a distinction between the “letter” and the “spirit” of Vatican II, which figures prominently in the recent debate on the hermeneutics of the council. Rather it is a recognition that the impact of Vatican II cannot fairly and fully be assessed apart from what has been officially promulgated as council-mandated reforms (e.g., new liturgical books and rites, the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the reform of the Roman Curia, and so on) and is thus a measure of its impact itself.

practice really contributes to the building up of the community's understanding and life of faith.⁷ Such a process of reception, however, is not a simple act of obedience and passive absorption. It is not always and necessarily a full acceptance of what is enjoined by ecclesiastical authorities. It may at times involve a partial and even total rejection of what has been taught or commanded. Thus, reception is necessarily a remaking or "inventing" of a creative fidelity to the tradition in the light of the contemporary situation; the reception of Vatican II is no exception.⁸

Since the reception of Vatican II in Asia consisted in a conscious attempt at applying the council documents to the specific contexts of Asia and the Asian churches, I begin with a brief overview of these manifold contexts. Next, since Vatican II's achievements, as many commentators on the council have suggested, can be categorized *ad intra* and *ad extra*, I consider how they have impacted Asian Catholicism under both of these aspects. I end with reflections on the prospects of the Asian Catholic Church in the light of Vatican II.

⁷ On reception, see Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: Macmillan, 1967). See also Robert Dionne, *The Papacy and the Church: A Study of Praxis and Reception in Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1987); Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982); Edward J. Kilmartin, "Reception in History: An Ecclesiological Phenomenon and Its Significance," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 34–54; and Dale T. Irwin, *Christian Histories, Christian Traditioning: Rendering Accounts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).

⁸ Among the immense bibliography on the reception of Vatican II, see Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1987); René Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II: Assessment and Prospectives; Twenty-Five Years after (1962–1987)*, 3 vols. (New York: Paulist, 1988–1989); Pierre-Marie Gy, *The Reception of Vatican II: Liturgical Reforms in the Life of the Church* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2003); Austin Ivereigh, ed., *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years After Vatican II* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Günther Wassilowsky, ed., *Zweites Vatikanum: Vergessene Anstösse, gegenwärtige Fortschreibungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 2004); Ladislav Orsy, *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2009); Christoph Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II, I: Accéder à la source* (Paris: Cerf, 2009); Theobald, "Dans les traces . . ." de la constitution "Dei Verbum" du concile Vatican II: *Bible, théologie et pratiques de la lecture* (Paris: Cerf, 2009); Gilles Routhier, *Vatican II: Herméneutique et réception* (Montreal: Fides, 2006); Routhier, ed., *Réceptions du Vatican II: Le concile au risque de l'histoire et des espaces humaines* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004); Gilles Routhier and Guy Robin, eds., *L'Autorité et les autorités: L'Herméneutique théologique du Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 2010); James L. Heft and John O'Malley, eds., *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); and Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist, 2012).

A CHURCH IN THE “ASIAN” CONTEXT

Many Asian theologians have argued that the church in Asia must be not simply *in* but *of* Asia, that is, a fully and wholly inculturated church.⁹ The context is not merely the location in which the church exists; rather it determines the church’s self-understanding and its mode of being. Consequently, to understand how Vatican II has shaped the church of Asia requires knowledge of the contexts in which the church exists and to whose challenges the church seeks to respond theologically and pastorally.

With regard to Asia, several features should be kept in mind, and it will be clear that its extreme diversities make it a near-impossibility to refer to anything—Christianity included—as “Asian.” First, immense geography and population. Conventionally divided into five regions: Central Asia (mainly the Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), East Asia (mainly China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan), South Asia (mainly Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), South-East Asia (mainly Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), and South-West Asia (the countries of the Middle East, Near East, or West Asia). Asia is the largest and most populous continent, with nearly two-thirds of the world’s seven billion population.

Second, overwhelming poverty. Despite the presence of some economically developed countries such as Japan and the so-called Four Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, Republic of Korea/South Korea, and Taiwan) and despite the dramatic rise of China and India as global economic powers, Asia still remains mired in widespread poverty, with some of the poorest countries on Earth (e.g., North Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar/Burma, and Bangladesh).

Third, political heterogeneity. In addition to having the largest democratic country, namely, India, Asia also features three remaining Communist countries of the world, namely, China, Vietnam, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), and several countries struggling to transition from military dictatorship or single-party states to democratic forms of government and from socialist economy to market economy.

⁹ The Jesuit Filipino bishop Francisco Claver (1929–2010) reports that during the 1998 Asian Synod in Rome, a curial cardinal told the assembled Asian bishops that they should not use the expression “Church of Asia” but “Church *in* Asia.” See Francisco Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008) 2. Indeed, Pope John Paul II’s postsynodal exhortation (1999) is entitled *Ecclesia in Asia*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html. All URLs referenced herein were accessed on March 5, 2013. Among Asian theologians who have strongly argued for a church *of* Asia is the Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris.

Fourth, cultural diversity. Though East, South, and Southeast Asia are dominated by the Indic and the Sinic cultures, and West and Central Asia by the Arabic-Islamic culture, Asia is a tapestry of extremely diverse cultures and civilizations, often within the same country. For instance, ethnically and culturally, India and China are teeming with astonishing diversity—more than 100 and 700 languages spoken in the Philippines and Indonesia respectively.

Fifth, religious pluralism. Asia is the cradle of all world religions. Besides Christianity, other Asian religions include Bahá'í, Bön, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism, as well as innumerable tribal and primal religions.

It is within the context of these mind-boggling diversities—geographic, linguistic, ethnic, economic, political, cultural, and religious—that Christianity and, more narrowly, the Catholic Church in Asia should be broached, especially when assessing the impact of Vatican II. With regard to Asian Christianity, several features should be kept in mind.¹⁰ First, ancient historical roots. Christianity may be said to be an Asian religion since it was born in Palestine, part of West Asia or the Middle East. Furthermore, though West Asia is now dominated by Islam, it was the main home of Christianity until the Arab conquest in the seventh century. The conventional narrative of Christianity as a Western religion, that is, one that originated in Palestine but soon moved westward, with Rome as its final destination, and from Rome as its epicenter, spread worldwide, belies the fact that in the first four centuries of Christianity, the most active and successful centers of mission were not Europe but Asia and Africa, with Syria as the center of gravity. But even Asian Christians outside West Asia can rightly boast an ancient and glorious heritage, one that is likely as old as the apostolic age. For instance, Indian Christianity, with the Saint Thomas Christians, can claim apostolic origins, with St. Thomas and/or St. Bartholomew as its founder(s). Chinese Christianity was born in the seventh century, with the arrival of the East Syrian (misnamed “Nestorian”) monk Alopen during the T'ang dynasty. Christianity arrived in other countries such as the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos as early as the 16th century.

Second, colonial heritage. One of the bitter ironies of Asian Christianity is that though born in Asia, it returned to its birthplace, and is still being regarded by many Asians, as a Western religion imported to Asia by

¹⁰ For an introduction to contemporary Asian Christianity, see Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). For a history of Asian Christianity, see Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992) and *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 2, *1500–1900* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005).

Portuguese and Spanish colonialists in the 16th century, and later by other European countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands, and lastly by the United States.

Third, numerical minority. In 2010, in Asia, Christians predominate in only two countries, namely, the Philippines and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (East Timor)—over 85% of their populations are Christian (mainly Catholic)—but their total Christian population remains relatively small.¹¹ In South Korea and Vietnam, Christians constitute an important but by no means numerically overwhelming presence.¹² In other countries, especially China, India, and Japan, to name the most populous ones, and in countries with a Muslim majority such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan, and in those countries where Buddhism predominates such as Cambodia, Hong Kong, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand, Christians form but a minuscule portion of the population.¹³ Without counting the Middle East, Christians constitute only slightly over 9% of the Asian population.¹⁴

¹¹ The total Christian population of these two countries is approximately 84 million (83 million in the Philippines and slightly over one million in Timor-Leste). These and the following statistics are taken from Todd M. Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2009).

¹² South Korea's Christianity (overwhelmingly Protestant) accounts for about 41.1% of the population of 50 million; Vietnamese Christianity (overwhelmingly Roman Catholic) represents 8.6% of the population of 85 million.

¹³ The following numbers represent the percentages of Christians vis-à-vis the population of each country in 2010 (though it must be remembered that the statistics are notoriously unreliable, especially in Communist countries): China (8.6), Taiwan (6.0), Japan (2.3), North Korea (2.0), Mongolia (1.7), Sri Lanka (8.8), India (4.8), Nepal (3.1), Pakistan (2.3), Bangladesh (0.59), Brunei (15.3), Singapore (16.1), Myanmar (8.0), Malaysia (9.1), Cambodia (2.0), Indonesia (12.1), Thailand (0.6), Laos (3.1), Kazakhstan (13.4), Kyrgyzstan (5.9), Tajikistan (1.4), Turkmenistan (1.5), and Uzbekistan (1.3). Dyron Daugherty provides helpful statistics of Asian Christianity in his *Church History: Five Approaches to a Global Discipline* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012) 234–38.

¹⁴ There are 350 million Christians in Asia out of the population of almost four billion. In absolute numbers Asia has more Christians than Western Europe, Eastern Europe, or North America. However, in relation to the total population of Asia, Christians constitute a minority and will likely remain so in the foreseeable future. On the place of Asian Christianity in world Christianity, see Dale T. Irwin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, vol. 1, *Earliest Christianity to 1493* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001); Irwin and Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, vol. 2, *Modern Christianity from 1454–1800* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012); Dyron B. Daugherty, *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Daugherty, *Church History: Five Approaches to a Global Discipline* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012); Douglas Jacobsen, *The World's Christians:*

Fourth, ecclesial diversity. Asia is the home of many different Christian ecclesiastical traditions, rites, and denominations, so that it is more accurate to use “Christianities” (in the plural) to denominate them. Due to its past extensive missions in Asia, Roman Catholicism is the largest church. Older than the Roman Catholic Church is the Malabar Church of India (“Saint Thomas Christians”). The Orthodox Church also has a notable presence in China, Korea, and Japan. The Anglican Church (including the Anglican Church of Canada) is well represented, especially in Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, and Pakistan. Various Protestant Churches have also flourished in almost all Asian countries, e.g., the Baptists (especially in North India), the Lutherans, the Mennonites, the Methodists, the Presbyterians (especially in Korea), and the Seventh-Day Adventists.¹⁵

Fifth, extensive migration. One of the best-kept secrets about Asian Christianity is that migration, national and international in scope, forced and voluntary in nature, economic and political in intent, has changed the faces of many Asian churches. Thanks to the ground-breaking research of scholars such as Kanan Kitani and Gemma Cruz, a fuller picture of contemporary Asian Christianity has emerged in which migration has played a key role in reshaping the membership and organization of the local churches and producing difficult pastoral and spiritual challenges for the churches.¹⁶

Sixth, the rapidly growing presence of Pentecostals and Evangelicals. These recent comers to Asia, often part of the waves of migration, have

Who They Are, Where They Are, and How They Got There (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Noel Davies and Martin Conway, *World Christianity in the 20th Century* (London: SCM, 2008); and Charles E. Farhadian, ed., *Introducing World Christianity* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

¹⁵ A helpful guide to Asian Christianity is Scott W. Sunquist, ed., *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

¹⁶ Kitani has focused on the Pentecostals and Evangelicals, especially in Japan, and Cruz on Roman Catholics, especially in Hong Kong. See Kanan Kitani, “Invisible Christians: Brazilian Migrants in Japan,” in *Latin America between Conflict and Reconciliation*, ed. Susan Flämig and Martin Leiner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012) 195–214; and Gemma Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). As an illustration of how migration has radically changed the faces of the Asian churches, Kitani points out the astounding fact that of the 1.1 million Christians in Japan, more than half are Brazilians, Filipinos, Chinese, and Koreans. This makes the expression “Japanese Christianity” rather misleading, as it may suggest that the majority of Christians in Japan are Japanese-born. Perhaps it is more accurate to speak of “Christianities in Japan.” See Kanan Kitani, “Emerging Migrant Churches in Japan: A Comparative Analysis of Brazilian and Filipino Migrants’ Church Activities,” in *Migration and Church in World Christianity: Contextual Perspectives*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

grown by leaps and bounds, particularly among ethnic minorities and disenfranchised social classes; and their brands of Christianity, with their emphasis on the literalist interpretation of the Bible, glossalia, prophecy, and healing, differ greatly from, and often are in severe conflict with, those of mainline Christian churches. The popularity of Pentecostals is well illustrated by the Yoido Full Gospel Church, located in Seoul, Korea, which is the largest Pentecostal church in the world, with nearly one million members. Furthermore, Pentecostal Christianity with its system of house churches is believed to be spreading like wildfire in China (such as the True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family) and to pose a serious threat to the government because it is unregistered and therefore beyond government control.¹⁷

Finally, indigenous and independent Christianity. Numerous indigenous and sectarian Christian churches and movements have been established, often inspired by nationalism, biblical fundamentalism, or charismatic leadership, and possessing little or no relationships among themselves and with mainline Christianity. Among the most famous are the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (founded by Gregorio Aglipay in 1902) and the Iglesia ni Cristo (founded by Felix Ysagun Manalo in 1914), both in the Philippines. In 1951 the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was formed to unite all Protestant churches in China and to promote a strategy of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. In 1957 the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was established to enable China's Religious Affairs Bureau to exercise control over Chinese Catholics. In 1980 the China Christian Council was founded as the umbrella organization for all Protestant churches in the People's Republic of China, allowing them to participate in the World Council of Churches.

This bird's-eye view of both Asia and Asian Christianity serves as the indispensable background and context for understanding the impact of Vatican II on the Asian Catholic Church. Indeed, it may be argued that the Asian Catholic Church's reception of Vatican II consisted mainly in appropriating the council's teachings and reform agenda to meet the challenges posed by this double context. Like the council, Asian Christianity has an essentially "pastoral" character. It "received" the council only to the extent that the teachings and the pastoral policies emanating from

¹⁷ On Pentecostalism in general, see the works of Walter J. Hollenweger and Allan H. Anderson. On Pentecostalism in Asia, the most authoritative and informative book is Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds., *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2005). From the Roman Catholic perspective, John Mansford Prior, *Jesus Christ the Way to the Father: The Challenge of the Pentecostals*, FABC Papers 119 (Hong Kong: FABC, 2006) is groundbreaking.

the council have proved helpful in meeting both the external challenges of Asia—geographical and demographic immensity, linguistic and ethnic diversity, economic poverty, Communist and military regimes, cultural richness, and religious pluralism—and the challenges internal to the church itself—ancient historical roots, colonial heritage, numerical minority, ecclesiastical diversity, widespread migration, Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism, and the emergence of independent and charismatic churches.

These two distinct sets of challenges correspond to Vatican II's *ad intra* and *ad extra* foci, and it is under these two aspects that an assessment of the Asian Catholic Church's reception of the council will be offered. Of course, these two aspects cannot be fully separated from each other. Indeed, they mutually influence each other: the better the church understands itself, the better it can relate to the world, and, vice versa, a better relation of the church with the world leads to the church's deeper self-understanding. Nevertheless, considering them separately serves as a useful heuristic device to put some order to what will otherwise prove a mass of unmanageable data about the Asian churches' recent past.

Before describing this process of reception it may be useful to take into account the helpful distinction suggested by church historian John O'Malley between "reception" and "trajectory":

Whereas "reception" generally indicates a direct application (or nonapplication) of explicit norms or directives, such as the revised liturgical forms, "trajectory" suggests something less obviously based on the council's norms and directives. It is related to reception, and perhaps can be considered a species of it. Introduction of it as a category of interpretation expands what we usually mean by reception.¹⁸

In what follows I speak of "reception" in the expanded sense of "trajectory" as suggested by O'Malley.

AD INTRA RECEPTION OF VATICAN II BY THE CHURCH OF ASIA

Vatican II is the first council to reflect at great length on its own nature (*Lumen gentium*) and on the various aspects of its internal life such as worship (*Sacrosanctum concilium*), reception of divine revelation (*Dei verbum*), the role of the laity (*Apostolicam actuositatem*), episcopal and priestly ministry (*Christus Dominus* and *Presbyterorum ordinis*), religious life (*Perfectae caritatis*), and the Eastern Catholic Churches (*Orientalium ecclesiarum*). In addition to these *ad intra* issues, the council has also considered the *ad extra* relations and tasks of the Catholic Church vis-à-vis the outside world: other Christian churches and communities (*Unitatis redintegratio*), other believers (*Nostra aetate*), evangelization and mission

¹⁸ After Vatican II xii.

(*Ad gentes*), education (*Gravissimum educationis*), the mass media (*Inter mirifica*), religious freedom (*Dignitas humanae*), and the modern world in general (*Gaudium et spes*).

Of course, Vatican II as a corpus of 16 official documents has had a decisive impact on the Asian Catholic Church. Asian Catholicism has received all these documents as authoritative guides for its *ad intra* and *ad extra* activities. However, as to be expected, it grants priority to some over others. From the frequency of citations, *Lumen gentium*, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, *Dei verbum*, *Gaudium et spes*, *Ad gentes*, and *Nostra aetate* have obtained pride of place. Important as Vatican II as a textual corpus has been for the Asian churches, it would be a mistake in assessing the council's impact on the Asian churches to limit one's attention to its 16 documents, even if interpreted as a coherent and intertextually integral theological corpus. One must also attend to Vatican II as "event," that is, a happening in, to, and by the church brought about under the impulse of the Holy Spirit in which the participants of the council as well as the church as a whole underwent a profound religious "conversion" that requires a new language and a new rhetoric to express itself adequately.¹⁹ Among Asian theologians who have eloquently and insistently argued for a reception of Vatican II as an "event" is the Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris. Contrasting "reform" with "renewal," Pieris calls Vatican II a "crisigenic" council, a "council of renewal, not a council of reform,"²⁰ the latter starting from the center, often forced upon the periphery and designed to proceed smoothly and gradually; the former beginning from the periphery and moving to the center, from the bottom to the top, and often with a stormy process.

¹⁹ O'Malley has identified four issues that Vatican II had to deal with: "how to deal with change, how to deal with the implications of a truly world church, with the relationship between center and periphery, and with the style in which the church conducts its mission" (ibid. xiv).

²⁰ See Aloysius Pieris, *Give Vatican II a Chance: Yes to Incessant Renewal, No to Reforms of the Reforms* (Gonawala-Kelaniya: Tulana Research Centre, 2010). Pieris recounts the astonishing advice that Karl Rahner gave his young audience during his *lectio brevis* at the Facoltà Teologica San Luigi in Naples: "Don't waste time on Vatican II." By this Rahner means that the task of expounding Vatican II should be left to him and the cohort of his age (the younger theologians have other tasks to do) because in Rahner's view, "*his* own contemporaries (the older generation to which he belonged, including some of the bishops who signed the documents) would find it well nigh impossible to grasp the totally *new perspective* within which the Council was formulating its message. If this new orientation was not recognized, the teachings of Vatican II could be misinterpreted along the beaten track of a theology which it was trying to leave behind as inadequate" (ibid. 70). This "new perspective" is what O'Malley and others refer to as "event."

With regard to Asian Catholicism's *ad intra* reception of Vatican II, one helpful way to chart this appropriation is by examining the teachings and activities of what is without the slightest doubt the most important organizational innovation of the Asian Catholic Church as a whole, namely, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).²¹ The Asian bishops at the Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila, Philippines, in 1970 decided to establish a permanent structure, not unlike the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), to help implement their resolutions. Approved by the Holy See in 1972, the FABC is a voluntary association of episcopal conferences in Asia. Its decisions do not juridically bind its members; acceptance of them is more an expression of collegial responsibility and ecclesial solidarity than canonical compliance. Its goals and objectives, to quote from its mission statement, include:

- To study ways and means of promoting the apostolate, especially in the light of Vatican II and post-conciliar official documents, and according to the needs of Asia
- To work for and to intensify the dynamic presence of the Church in the total development of the peoples of Asia
- To help in the study of problems of common interest to the Church in Asia, and to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinated action
- To promote inter-communication and cooperation among local Churches and bishops of Asia
- To render service to episcopal conferences of Asia in order to help them to meet the needs of the People of God
- To foster a more ordered development of organizations and movements in the Church at the international level
- To foster ecumenical and interreligious communication and collaboration²²

It is clear from these goals and objectives, especially the first, with its explicit insistence on following Vatican II and the postconciliar documents, that the FABC intends to be an official organ for the reception of Vatican II in Asia, as it seeks to implement the three ecclesiological principles advocated by the council: episcopal collegiality, ecclesial communion, and dialogue as the mode of being church. On the other hand, it is equally clear that the FABC could not have come into being without the impetus of Vatican II. Thus, it is as much the most mature fruit of the process of reception of the council as the most effective instrument for the implementation of the council's teaching and reform agenda.

²¹ For information on the FABC, see its website: <http://www.fabc.org>. For a history of the FABC's first three decades, see Edmund Chia, *Thirty Years of FABC: History, Foundation, Context, and Theology*, FABC Papers no. 106 (Hong Kong: FABC, 2003).

²² At <http://www.fabc.org/about.html>.

In constituting its membership, the FABC has also sought to meet most, if not all, of the above-mentioned challenges facing Asian Christianity. Geographically, the 18 episcopal conferences that are the FABC's full members and the nine that are its associate members hail from all the five regions of Asia, including Central Asia.²³ Linguistically, ethnically, economically, politically, and culturally, the FABC is marked by the same kind of diversity and multiplicity prevalent in Asia. (English is by default the common language.) Also represented are churches of ancient origins, with their different rites and ecclesiastical disciplines; their presence provides unique opportunities for the implementation of the council's decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches (*Orientalium ecclesiarum*). In this way, more than any other continental episcopal conferences, the FABC embodies the ideals and reality of the "world church" that Vatican II ushered in.

The structure of the FABC also promotes and facilitates collaboration among the churches and among the laity and the clergy. Besides the General Assembly, which is its supreme body and meets in regular session every four years,²⁴ the FABC has the Central Committee (composed of the presidents of the member episcopal conferences or their officially

²³ The episcopal conferences that are the FABC's full members come from Bangladesh, East Timor, India (comprising three episcopal conferences based on their distinctive "Rites," namely, the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India [the Latin Rite], the Syro-Malabar Bishops' Synod, and the Syro-Malankara Bishops' Conference), Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. The FABC's associate members come from Hong Kong, Macau, Nepal, Novosibirsk (Russia), Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. To be a full member, an episcopal conference must have a minimum of three dioceses. The absence of an official organization representing the bishops of mainland China is conspicuous.

²⁴ The General Assembly is composed of (1) all the presidents of the episcopal conferences that are members of the FABC, or their officially designated bishop-designates; (2) bishop-delegates elected by the episcopal conferences that are full or associate members; and (3) members of the Standing Committees. Up to 2013 there have been ten General Assemblies, each with a distinct theme. The last assembly met in Vietnam, December 10–16, 2013, with 111 official participants. That the Communist government allowed the FABC's tenth General Assembly to be held in Vietnam was in itself an extraordinary diplomatic success for the Vietnamese church leaders. At the conclusion of each assembly the FABC issues a "Final Statement." For the Final Statements of the first seven General Assemblies, see FABC and its various institutes; and see *For All The Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, vol. 1, *Documents from 1970 to 1991*, ed. Gaudencio Rosales and Catalino G. Arévalo (New York/Quezon City: Orbis/Claretian, 1992); vol. 2, *Documents from 1992 to 1996*, ed. Franz-Josef

designated bishop-alternates), the Standing Committee (composed of five bishops elected from the five regions of Asia), and the Central Secretariat. Though the members of the Central and Standing Committees are all bishops, the members of the General Secretariat, which is the principal service agency and an instrument of coordination of activities within and outside the FABC, is composed of nine “offices” whose members are mostly priests, religious, and lay persons, whose expertise and work are vital to the FABC.²⁵ These offices regularly organize workshops and seminars for all kinds and levels of church ministers, thus enabling an effective collaboration among the bishops and their collaborators, and among the local and national churches. The written statements and summaries of these meetings, readily accessible online, serve as a convenient and reliable means for church leaders and rank-and-file Asian Catholics to update themselves on the current issues and problems confronting the Asian churches and their possible solutions. From the names of these nine offices it is clear that no area of Christian life, including the teachings and reforms of Vatican II itself, is left untouched by the FABC.

In addition to the FABC, perhaps the major landmark in the history of Asian Catholicism’s reception of Vatican II is the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Convoled by John Paul II to celebrate the second millennium of Christianity, the Asian Synod met in Rome, April 18 to May 14, 1998. It has been rightly hailed as the coming of age of the Asian Catholic Church. A careful reading of the responses of the Asian episcopal conferences to the *Lineamenta*, the individual bishops’ speeches during the synod, and John Paul II’s postsynodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, readily shows how far the Asian Catholic Church has moved forward from its barely noticeable contributions to Vatican II to the Asian Synod, and all that thanks to its wholehearted reception of Vatican II, or more precisely, the council’s trajectories.²⁶

Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian, 1997); vol. 3, *Documents from 1997 to 2002*, ed. Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian, 2002); vol. 4, *Documents from 2002 to 2006*, ed. Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian, 2007). These four volumes also contain the documents of the various “offices” of the FABC. Most of the documents related to the FABC are available online and at the FABC Documentation Centre located in Bangkok, Thailand, which is part of the General Secretariat of the FABC located in Hong Kong.

²⁵ The nine offices are: Human Development, Social Communication, Laity, Theological Concerns, Education and Student Chaplaincy, Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, Evangelization, Clergy, and Consecrated Life.

²⁶ On the Asian Synod, see Peter C. Phan, ed., *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

RECEPTION OF VATICAN II FOR THE CHURCH'S RELATIONS *AD EXTRA*

The reception of Vatican II by the Asian Catholic Church *ad intra* has been extensive and enduring, especially through the agency of the FABC and as demonstrated by the Asian Synod. Ironically, however, if one were to survey the abundant official documents of the FABC and the writings of Asian theologians, one would be struck by the dearth of explicit treatments of ecclesiology. If anything, there is a conscious shying away from “churchy” themes such as papal primacy and infallibility, apostolic succession, magisterium, episcopal power, the hierarchical structure, canon law, the Roman Curia, ordination of women, and the like. Not that these issues are of no importance for the Asian churches. They are. But they do not occupy the central position on the theological radar of the Asian churches.

Instead of developing an ecclesiocentric or church-centered ecclesiology, Asian bishops and theologians have fostered what may be called a regnocentric or kingdom-of-God-centered way of being church. Their emphasis is not on establishing new church organizations or on instituting structural reforms, much less elaborating a theoretical ecclesiology. Rather, their main, if not exclusive, concern has been to implement, pastorally and spiritually, ways of being church that are appropriate to the sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and religious contexts of Asia, as these have been sketched out above. In other words, in appropriating Vatican II, the Asian Catholic Church has been more interested in those conciliar and postconciliar documents that deal with the church's *ad extra* relations. Among these *Gaudium et spes*, *Ad gentes*, and *Nostra aetate* have been most frequently invoked.

A quick glance at the themes of the ten past General Assemblies as well as those of the innumerable seminars and workshops organized by the FABC's nine offices will confirm this assessment.²⁷ In addition to these official and semiofficial documents, the FABC also publishes what it calls “FABC Papers.” These booklet-size publications are theological writings, mainly by native Asian theologians, addressing particular issues

²⁷ The themes of the FABC's ten General Assemblies are, in chronological order: evangelization (1974), life of the church (1978), church as community of faith (1982), the laity (fourth, 1986), a new way of being church (1990), discipleship (1995), church as love and service (2000), family (2004), the Eucharist (2008), and new evangelization (2012). The tenth General Assembly celebrated inter alia the 40th anniversary of the approval of the statutes of the FABC by the Holy See and the 50th anniversary of the convocation of Vatican II. Underlying these diverse themes is the leitmotif of the new way of being church in Asia.

affecting Asian churches.²⁸ By and large all these writings focus on what has become a mantra among Asian Catholic churches, namely, the “triple dialogue”: dialogue with the poor (liberation), with cultures (inculturation), and with other Asian religions (interreligious dialogue). By dialogue is meant not theoretical discussions among religious experts but the fundamental mode-of-being-church toward outsiders, be they other Christians (ecumenical dialogue), non-Christian believers (interreligious dialogue), or nonbelievers (humanistic dialogue). This dialogue takes a fourfold form: common life, working together for the common good, theological discussion, and sharing religious experiences.

Continuing further the assessment of the impact of Vatican II on Asian Catholic Christianity, I will examine how this triple dialogue has been understood by the FABC and some influential Asian Catholic theologians. Here, O’Malley’s distinction between “reception” and “trajectory” is highly relevant. In fact, this triple dialogue belongs more to extending the council’s trajectories than to its reception. Needless to say, all three dialogues have been recommended by the council, as the three conciliar documents mentioned above, repeatedly invoked by the FABC, testify. It is true as well that liberation theology is the original contribution of the Latin American church (with an emphasis on liberation from economic poverty), and that inculturation has been a deep concern of African Christianity (with a stress on liberation from cultural and anthropological domination). Nevertheless, it is the Asian Catholic churches that have consistently, insistently, and officially adopted the three dialogues in all their reciprocal and intrinsic connections as the overall agenda for pastoral ministry, church life, and spirituality, so much so that “dialogue” has become synonymous with the new way of being church in Asia.²⁹

Perhaps the most comprehensive summary of this new way of being church is found in the Final Statement of the FABC’s Seventh General Assembly (2000), with its theme “A Renewed Church in Asia: a Mission of Love and Service.” The General Assembly sees the 30-year history of the FABC as woven by eight movements: toward a church of the poor and the church of the young, toward a truly local and inculturated church, toward an authentic community of faith, toward active integral evangelization and a new sense of mission, toward empowerment of lay

²⁸ These booklets, numbering nearly 150, are available on the FABC website.

²⁹ See Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003); Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003); and Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

men and women, toward active involvement in generating and serving life, and toward the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor, and with the cultures.³⁰ This new way of being church had been elaborated at length by the Fifth General Assembly (1990), with its theme “Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium.” Its Final Statement envisions “alternative ways of being church in the Asia of the 1990s” and describes them as constituting the church in Asia as a “communion of communities,” a “participatory church,” a “church that faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in the dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all,” and as “a prophetic sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet to come.”³¹

This new way of being church is the consistent and pervasive perspective in which Vatican II has been received and its trajectories carried forward in Asian Catholic Christianity. This is supremely true not only of the FABC and its offices in general but also of most Asian Catholic theologians of both the older and younger generations. Among the former group mention has already been made of Aloysius Pieris, who may rightly be regarded as one of the most innovative theologians of Asia. Together with him are to be named, among many others, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Carlos H. Abesamis, Georg Evers, Felix Wilfred, Michael Amaladoss, Virginia Fabella, Kathleen Coyle, José M. De Mesa, Jacob Kavunkal, Jacob Parappally, Soosai Arokiasamy, Antoinette Gutzler, Mark Fang, James Kroeger, John Mansford Prior, and Vu Kim Chinh.³² Among the younger generation, mention should be made of Jonathan Tan, Edmund Chia, Gemma Cruz, Vimal Tirimanna, and the theologians associated with the FABC’s Office of Theological Concerns.³³ A growing number

³⁰ See the full text of the Final Statement in *For All the Peoples of Asia* 3:1–16. See also Peter C. Phan, “A New Way of Being Church in Asia: Lessons for the American Catholic Church,” in *Inculturation and the Church in North America*, ed. T. Frank Kenney (New York: Crossroad, 2006) 145–62.

³¹ For the full text of the Final Statement, see *For All the Peoples of Asia* 1:273–89.

³² See M. Amaladoss and R. Gibellini, eds., *Teologia in Asia* (Brescia, Italy: Queriniana, 2006), which also contains essays by non-Catholic theologians. Deserving special mention is James H. Kroeger, an American Maryknoller and long-time professor of missiology at the Loyola School of Theology, Manila. With his prolific writings he is a tireless and ardent advocate of the FABC and Asian Catholic theology.

³³ See Vimal Tirimanna, ed., *Harvesting from the Asian Soil: Towards an Asian Theology* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2011); and Kathleen Coyle, ed., *40 Years of Vatican II and the Churches of Asia and the Pacific: Looking Back and Moving Forward*, *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42.1/2 (2005).

of doctoral dissertations and master's theses have been written on the FABC and Asian theology.³⁴

TRAJECTORIES OF VATICAN II IN ASIA

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the convocation of the Second Vatican Council and as we take stock of the council and its reception throughout the world, it is clear that the Catholic Church as a whole is at a crossroads. There is a widespread sense of an urgent need for renewal and even moral and spiritual purification in the whole church *a capite ad calcem*. This realization is made more insistent by the discouraging perception that the “reforms” of Vatican II have been “reformed” in the last few decades and by the numerous scandals of various sorts (not only of a sexual nature) that have wrecked the credibility of the church as a sign of God’s presence in history. By happenstance, as this essay is being composed, the cardinals are meeting in Rome to elect a new pope after the unexpected resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, who felt no longer up to the task of shepherding the church because of advanced age and ill health.

The question naturally arises: Can the Asian Catholic Church, with its manifold attempts at receiving Vatican II *ad intra* and *ad extra*, provide some useful hints for the “renewal” (and not simply “reform,” to reprise Pieris’s expressions) of the church? In other words, are there “trajectories” and unfinished business from Vatican II that need to be carried forward to achieve or restore the true renewal of the church at this critical juncture? Like any genuine church renewal, this renewal must be both *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, the two movements working in tandem and in support of each other.

An answer may be derived from the Final Statement of the FABC’s Tenth General Assembly with the theme “Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in Asia,” which met December 10–16, 2012, in Xuan Loc, Vietnam, an event that has been hailed as a “miracle” because of the location of the meeting. As the General Assembly sees it, the fundamental task of the church is to respond to the specific challenges of our time, and like Vatican II, it sets out to “read the signs of the times.” Its *instrumentum laboris*, titled “FABC at Forty Years: Responding to the Challenges of Asia: A New Evangelization,” analyzes 15 megatrends currently affecting Asia and Asian Christianity:

- globalization as an economic process and a cultural phenomenon
- a secular, materialist, consumerist, and relativist culture

³⁴ See James H. Kroeger, *Theology from the Heart of Asia: FABC Doctoral Dissertations I (1985–1998)*; and *Theology from the Heart of Asia: FABC Doctoral Dissertations II (1998–2008)* (Quezon City: Claretian, 2008).

- widespread and systemic poverty
- the phenomenon of migrant workers and refugees
- the oppression of the indigenous peoples
- immense population
- threat to religious freedom
- threats to life
- the increasing role of social communications
- the endangerment to ecology
- the lack of empowerment of the laity
- discrimination against women
- the majority of youth
- the presence of Pentecostalism
- and the rise of Asian missionary societies

An essential part of the effort to meet these challenges, according to the FABC's Tenth General Assembly, is to continue the process of reception of Vatican II and expansion of its trajectories, as the following statement of the General Assembly makes clear: "The same Spirit who animated Vatican II now summons us to become **renewed evangelizers for a new Evangelization**" (emphasis original). This reception and expansion of Vatican II requires a new spirituality: "To be renewed as evangelizers we have to respond to the Spirit active in the world, in the depths of our being, in the signs of the times and in all that is authentically human. **We need to live a spirituality of New Evangelization**" (emphasis original).

In elaborating this spirituality of New Evangelization, the General Assembly lists the following ten recommendations:

- personal encounter with Jesus Christ
- passion for mission
- focus on the kingdom of God
- commitment to communion
- dialogue as a mode of life and mission
- humble presence
- prophetic evangelization
- solidarity with victims
- care for creation
- and boldness of faith and martyrdom³⁵

It is interesting to note that all ten recommendations, though deeply rooted in Christian spirituality (especially the first), are oriented *ad extra*,

³⁵ For the full text of the Final Statement of the Tenth General Assembly, see <http://www.fabc.org/10th%20plenary%20assembly/Documents/FABC%20-%20X%20PA%20Final%20Message%20-%202012.pdf>.

as ways of being church toward others in contemporary Asia. The FABC's dominant concern is centered on the kingdom of God (not on the institutional church); mission (not inward self-absorption); communion (not splendid isolation); dialogue (not imperialistic monologue); solidarity with victims (not victim-blaming and withdrawal into an otherworldly "spirituality"); care of creation (not exploitation of natural resources); and witness/martyrdom (not cowardly compromise).

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to see in these extensions of Vatican II's trajectories by the Asian Catholic Church a way forward for the Catholic Church in these dark times. If so, we will come full circle: the gift that Rome gave to Asia 50 years ago is now brought back to Rome enlarged, enhanced, enriched.