RE-INTERPRETING THE CATHOLICS' IMAGES OF THE CHURCH IN JAVA – PART II

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The Believers' Intentions to Participate

Different from images arising from the believers' cultural preferences and the church's relevance in society, images associated with the believers' intentions to participate in the church might have more to do with particular elements of church communities. They may appear as things that the believers have so far experienced as church communities and that would be maintained to continue their existence in Java. The following images in some measure have become their motivations to abide in the church as Christians. In this sense, their motivations are not so much 'cultural' and 'social' as typically and communally Christian in Java. Since these images can be considered as the motivating factors for the believers as Christians, their character might be described as 'spiritual'. Hence the consequence is that these images would bring up the believers' personal experiences as members of the church community. The faithful would likely take these images for granted, not to make sense their own cultural preferences or prove the social contextualisations whatsoever, but due to their thirst for living their faith as a Christian community. Through the following discussions, we might want to consider the believers' simplicity in knowing and tasting their experiences of being Christian.

From their participation driven by brotherhood and connectedness, we may presume that the believers in Java imagine the church (community) as **[9]** an **'intimate friendship'**.[1] This intimacy can be seen and perceived evidently when one immerses oneself into their meetings, especially in the smaller communities. Based on the responses in the survey it appears that they feel in solidarity with their suffering brothers and sisters by being involved in the church activities. Still, this solidarity seems to appear more as a deep compassion, since they would easily feel that something is missing if they have not attended church meetings in *lingkungan* and in the parish for some time. The believers cannot stay in their homes alone. They need to go out to meet their Christian sisters and brothers. They need to care for them concretely by visiting the sick regularly or celebrating together as many familial events as possible with ecclesial ceremonies or prayers. In this atmosphere, the intimacy seems to have been enkindled by their endless gratefulness of being baptised and thus united as friends of the same faith and members of the same family. The feeling of being 'lucky' (Jav. and Snd. '*untung*') has always been without difficulty sought by the believers in all circumstances and has become an adage to picture their warm acts of solidarity. When the church is illustrated as an 'intimate friendship', many things would appear friendly to its members. The church becomes not so much institutional as cosy and relaxed community. It is supposed that the members as well as the leaders are friends to one another and their togetherness is characterised with affectionate language and relationships. The believers seem to have no difficulty of employing this spirit in their day-to-day experiences as Christians. Due summons towards this enthusiasm, on the other hand, might need to be addressed to the leaders.

A pervasive biblical image apropos this image would be the church as a '*brotherhood*'[2] (I Peter 2:17; 5:9; Mark 3:35; 10:29-30; Matt. 25:40). We can absorb the sense of solidarity from the related passages, but also the fraternal sharing of God's love in Christ Jesus. In the new family of Jesus Christ, the emphasis falls upon the members' care to the least of those who are members of his family (Matt. 25:40). It is this care, because of their new familial membership, that makes compassion their daily interpretation of God's intimacy. However, the biblical image also adds to the quality of familial relationships by extending it towards the whole community as a 'brotherhood' (I Peter 2:17). These relationships would be different from the ordinary ones existing among the family members, since they could be achieved, on the contrary, by letting go one's own "house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields" for the sake of Jesus Christ

and the good news (Mark 10:29-30). The bond of love among the Christians is now broadened but yet heightened. The biblical image 'brotherhood' here not only touches on familial love, but also on the *love* among the *true friends* of Jesus Christ. We can imagine that a church portrayed in such image would be composed of intimate friends rather than sisters and brothers in the ordinary sense. This image is helpful for the interpretation of the church as an 'intimate friendship' in that it sheds light on the vertical dimension of the latter. Lasting friendships require the necessary foundation that is the loving Spirit of God who enables those involved in the relationships call one another friend. If there are solidarity and intimacy among the friends of this community, these would be a participation in the suffering and life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We can also mention another biblical image which, albeit appears only once in the New Testament, may throw some light on the different aspect of church's community life. It is the church seen in the faithful as '*a letter from Christ*[3] (II Cor. 3:2-3). This image brings the tones that the believers are a letter from Christ, prepared by the apostles, written with the Spirit of the living God on the tablets of human hearts, and to be known and read by all. What might be productive in this image with regard to the church as an 'intimate friendship' is its way of emphasising the message from Christ in *the hearts* of the believers and the apostles. This image may corroborate the spirit of genuine *openness* among the believers, which might not be applied easily in the ordinary context of familial relationships. The gospel message must now be communicated and if necessary be reminded to each other in the spirit of a friendship, because friends talk and listen with their hearts and not only because of certain familial responsibilities and positions. The church as an intimate friendship should be characterised by the dialogues from heart to heart among its members about the message from Christ. We may see that the above set of images can be included according to the contents in the similarity of (a) *being God's new family*. The difference from the other set of images is on its particular way of experiencing solidarity and love among friends.

The roles of the priest for the believers in Java seem to be irreplaceable to an extent that the church might be seen as **[10]** a **'priesthood'**. Nevertheless, its significance in the local church appears more charismatic and spiritual rather than institutional, given that at the same time the believers have in fact realised the roles of the laity in church meetings and activities.[4] The leadership of the laity in the church is not denied, but yet not responded enthusiastically by the believers. There is a growing acquaintance recently

that the competence of lay leaders has been acknowledged also in the domains in the church that formerly were trusted only to the priests. However, there seems to be a kind of '*faithful dependence*' to the priests in community meetings. It has been a custom in Java that whenever a meeting is attended by a priest, he would be given an opportunity to address the audience or the matter discussed, often at the end of the meeting, even though there is not much relevance of the matter with the priest's competence. Thus, competence might not be the motive. It could be that the believers' intention was quite related to their participation in the church leadership represented by the ordained leaders. This participation is noticeably more *spiritual* rather than institutional or related to the church activities. We may identify this model of living the community life as priestly centralised, although not in its negative understanding. Being centralised on the priest in this way for the believers need not cancel their participation in the dynamic of being communal church. The spiritual character of this 'faithful dependence' is motivated by the wish to focus their communal encounters on the gospel message conveyed by the priest. In this sense, the centrality of the priest is not in many respects hierarchical but communal. The believers are in the know that their participation in the leadership of the priest present in their midst can accentuate their faithfulness and dependence to the gospel message.

We can link this image to the biblical image of the church as '*branches of the vine*'[5] hinted in the gospel of John, chapter 15. It is Jesus Christ as the stock of the vine that supports his followers as the branches. The branches are totally dependent on the stock. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5). The expression is quite condensed in this passage that, in Paul S. Minear's words, "Christological reality is absolutely basic to the ecclesiological reality."[6] It must have been clear that in order to continue to exist, the branches should bear fruit. It is through the abode in Jesus Christ, that is, in his word, that his followers can bear fruit. In thus sense, the most important message of this image lies in the act of 'remaining with Christ', which is the basic attitude required from the members of the Johannine community. The church pictured as 'branches of the vine' underlines the fact of the members' dependency on Jesus Christ and his word. Their fruit may become manifest in various domains of the church, but this bearing of fruit will possible insofar as they stay close to and inline with the gospel. And yes, the church is *centralistic towards the gospel*. When this interpretation is juxtaposed with the image of the church as 'priesthood' above, the biblical

image can orient the latter's accent to the gospel rather than to the person of the priest. It is also the responsibility of the priest to put the communal weight on the gospel message.

If we want to consider that the image 'priesthood' might have been the believers' spiritual motive to participate in the church, we also can refer to another biblical image of the church as '*the cup of the Lord*'.[7] What is emphasised in this image is not that the church is the cup, but that the cup signifies partnership in the blood of Christ. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?" (I Cor. 10:16). The church imaged this way manifests itself in the *partnership* of the believers and the priest in the blood of Christ, that is, in the priesthood of Christ. Here, the fruit of this participation is life, since only those who drink the blood of the Lord shall have life among themselves (cf. John 6:53). In short, participation in the priesthood of the priest should become partnership in the priesthood of the Lord. A different content similarity can be found in this set of biblical and communal images, that is, concerning the (e) *communal partnership* in the church. Though only two sets of images are included in this similarity ([10] and [16]), the content might need to be distinguished independently, given that it has surfaced in our survey. The accent of communal partnership put in this image would be the faithful dependence among the believers and the leaders.

Among the believers in Java, there has been a recurring theme about the life-applicability or reality-relatedness of church services and activities. This theme gives rise to an image of the church as **[11]** the **'source of answers about life'**. This somewhat nonpictorial image about the church might have become one of the motives of the believers to participate in the church. In contrast with the cultural motivations, our exploration[8] showed that the believers' participation in the church seemed to be motivated by the need to find answers to their questions about life. As an example, the believers tend to look for practical implications and life applications in the homily conveyed to them.[9] They want to be given some answers by the church not only in spiritual but also secular matters.[10] The church described in this image can be seen above all in its meetings and services. The believers come together in these activities not only to express their faith culturally, but particularly to find some answers from the church to their problems in life. It is in this gist that this image becomes less related with cultural matters and more pertaining to the *real life* of the faithful. Despite that, this life oriented intention is not utterly detached from the Christian faith because of its ecclesial context. The believers wittingly attempt to find answers in the

church as its members. In many cases, their questions would have a spiritual character, though basically are addressed towards the realities of life encountered. They participate in church meetings and services so as to share in the life that Jesus offers through his church. One can imagine that such intention can easily convoke the faithful to the meetings where the Word of God is read and interpreted to them. The church meetings and the dialogues of faith in this sense become the source of answers about life in the light of the Word. For the believers in Java, togetherness like this encourages them spiritually to get through the difficulties everyday. Therefore, the presence of homilies and reflections based on the Scriptures in such community meetings would be imperative, since it is through these biblical interpretations that the believers, then, may go home in peace carrying with them this spiritual assurance. In a manner of speaking, the believers need the church for the sake of the *life-applicability* of the gospel message.

We may sense that the biblical images germane to this image would be the church as '*life*'[11] and '*the tree of life*'.[12] The basic idea in these images is the sharing in the life of Jesus Christ as the source of life. It is mostly in the gospel of John that we can find the expression of 'life' as a communal dimension of the life God shares with us (John 5:26; 10:10; 20:31). We can also find elsewhere how 'life' is associated with 'gracious gift' (I Peter 3:7), Christ (Col. 3:3), and God's own (Eph. 4:18). But it is in Rev. 22:2 that the image 'the tree of life' may imagerially show what is far and wide in the church offered by God to its members. In these images, the church signifies the propinquity and the all-encompassing presence of God's life to the believers. From the perspective of the church members, this dynamic manifests in the acts of *communal sharing of the blessings* of the Spirit. The members of the church enjoy its "twelve kinds of fruit", which bring eternal life in their worldly existence, and yet are healed by "the leaves of the tree" (Rev. 22:2). When this insight is related to the image of the church as 'the source of answers about life', we may bring to light the life-applicability of the gospel message the church can convey to the members.

God's intention of being present in the church is to share the life that gives the believers blessings and healings. God would certainly do anything so that the believers are assured of having come together to the right place. They cannot be left alone and homeward without receiving the life (answers) they have sought in the church. It is then the challenge for the church to convey in every possible way the Word of God so that it would be living and insightful for the believers. Imagining the God who shares life through the Word in the church will bring the consequence that the gospel should be

brought to life and should also shed light on the lives of the believers. It is only through such endeavour that the believers' participation in the church will remain long-lasting, which means that the church itself will become the path towards the eternal life. Referring to the responses of the believers that have induced this church image, we might discern that the church as God's life shared in blessings and healings should bring the cultural values back to the real life of the believers. This image may correct our approach to the believers' ways of figuring the church from their perspective. We can see that the above images are similarly speaking about the content similarity of (d) *daily spiritualities* (cf. [7] and [12]), except that here the tone tends towards the sharing of God's life through the relevance of church services to the believers' realities.

Founded on the characters of the meetings surfacing in the survey,[13] the next image illustrating the believers' intention to participate in the church would be **[12]** an **'informal gathering'**. A church community imagined as an informal gathering emphasises the *informality* of its meetings and the *spontaneous* atmosphere colouring the relationships. We have seen that among the believers in Java it is not whether the meetings are attended by many people or not that matters, but whether these meetings can be open to people of different categories. That is why their response has been quite positive on the need of more ecclesial categorical communities in the church. They also did not intend to oppose their participation in the *lingkungan* meetings with their involvement in different church movements or activities. It is the informality of the meetings and the relationships that seems to mean something to them. Being present in the church meetings would be pleasing and encouraging if they are not too much obliged. Equally, when the presence in a church meeting is imposed upon them, the continuity of such meeting and their enthusiasm to be present will decline considerably. In reality, this informality can genuinely mirror the believers' deeper relatedness to each other like the commitment of a circle of friends. Needless to say, they have felt the connectedness as a family in the church, but this relationship is to be elevated more sensibly into a *committed togetherness*. We may have distinguished that a fellowship of friends, while remains spontaneous, will bring about sincere 'obedience' without sacrificing the informality. When this character is lived by the believers in the spirit of openness to other people of different backgrounds, the image of the church as an 'informal gathering' might become one of the many ways of evangelisation. It means that the believers' way of getting together like this can bring in a different atmosphere in their neighbourhood, namely, a Christian atmosphere of informal yet

inclusive gathering.

A vivid biblical image that can corroborate this image would be the church as '*friends*'.[14] We can find this image exposed incomparably in the gospel of John (15:12-20). But we have to note that the term 'friends' in this passage is first of all linked to *obedience*. "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (v. 14). It is this obedience that makes the disciples friends of Jesus. We can sense that there is a nuance of *responsibility* in being a community of friends. It is not simply a relation of friendship. It is a commitment to be present and to live for these friends. This commitment has been shown by the master who now has become the disciples' best friend, that is, the one who has such a great love that he is willing to lay his life for his friends (v. 13). This community of friends, therefore, is a community of committed disciples who have come together not because of an imposed obligation, but because of a voluntary love and an intended sacrifice. The church pictured in this image may unearth the deeper truths of faith among the believers as it will lead them to know everything that God has told through Jesus Christ. This is what makes them not being called 'slaves', because 'slaves' would not know what Jesus is doing for them. The love that these friends gives to each other is a love characterised with obedience and responsibility, though not deprived of its intimacy and informality. This biblical image of 'friends' enriches the images of the church as an 'informal gathering' and a 'united family'. We could intuit that the reality of being friends in a church community initiates an atmosphere of trust and freedom in its meetings, meaning that, as it were, everyone may come and go freely according to one's conditions. There should be no sort of alienation among them on whatever reason, since, once again, they are not 'slaves'. They, too, are not friends on their own, because it is the Lord who has chosen them (John 15:16) and who first calls them "my friends" (Luke 12:4). The church imagined as 'friends' may help invigorate the church meetings so that the latter will not become too institutional and therefore less appealing to the believers.[15] In any case this image should remind those concerned about the believers' participation in the church, since a genuine participation cannot be imposed with any programme however communal it might be, but at best arises from the loyalty among these friends of Jesus.

Perhaps a similar biblical image of the church that can also support this image is '*hosts and guests*'[16] as pictured in Matt. 25:31-46. The church portrayed in this biblical image appears as a community that welcomes and serves everyone, whether he or she is poor, naked, hungry, or a prisoner. This community is strongly characterised by hospitality as Jesus himself teaches,

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (Matt. 10:40). Welcoming and serving are the main gestures of the church members in their daily lives, and in this spirit of *hospitality* we can imagine that the image of 'informal gathering' can easily be found among them. The main reason for such hospitality is that God has welcomed them (Rom. 14:3) and therefore they have to welcome and be responsive to each other. This image might translate what it means to be obedient to God in the daily togetherness of the members. Attentions and care are given especially to those who are poor, naked, hungry and imprisoned as an act of welcoming but not in its institutional sense. These gestures remain informal for the believers because these are an expression of gratefulness to God who has always been thoughtful to them. It will not be difficult to find such hospitality among the believers in Java especially when we pay a visit to their houses. While much of this hospitality might arise from their culture, its employment in the church communal activities can become a genuine expression of gratefulness to God. At this point, we would like to list this set of biblical and communal images under the content similarity of (d) *daily spiritualities* due to its informality and everydayness.

Contextual and Meaningful Images Reconsidered

The following images flow from the second part of my survey results, consisting of five observations regarding the *image* of the church, the *aim* of coming to the church, the *vitality* that will support church's existence, the image of church's *leader*, and the church's relation with the *culture*. I will consider the choices in each of the observations complementarily and not only that which receives greatest percentage, so as to reveal the meaningful vigour of the images in the Javanese context. The following images must have been unique to the believers, considering that the questions have been formulated in plain so as to lead them to respond towards perceptible images and actions. Given that the five questions of this part mentioned the term 'church' explicitly, we might be sure that each image or action in the options must have contributed particular nuances to the church image in the eyes of the believers.

The *first* observation concerning the church image can be illustrated in the image of the church as **[13]** a **'family meal'**.[17] The dominant image in this series is 'big family' and the complementing images are 'sheepfold', 'meeting place', 'banquet', 'rice barn' and 'sailboat'. One image that was not chosen was 'school building' and we already discussed that this might refer to

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the believers' preference towards informal learning atmosphere rather than the formal educational one reflected by the image. The church image looked upon by the believers in this part may be illustrated as a big family brought together in a certain place and looked after as a flock of sheep, sharing and enjoying the meal which is the fruit of the earth supplied by God so that the members may have the strength to continue their journey ahead. There is a strong accent of *sharing God's blessings*[18] in a meal attended by all the members of the family and coloured by appropriateness and harmony in their behaviours and manners of speaking. For the believers in Java, there is no greater heart-warming togetherness than having meal together in the presence of all family members. This togetherness would be different from that, for example, in a family meeting which may have a more 'serious' agenda to talk about. Having meal together with the family members evokes the feelings of being nurtured and nursed, of being reconciled and taken under the family's wing, and of being not alone but always accompanied by one's own sisters, brothers and parent.[19] In a family meal, people are greeting, laughing and offering hospitality more freely than in any other kind of meeting. If truth be told, it is not so much a 'meeting' as a feast of *togetherness*, since people are not sitting together silently around the same table to finish their meal, but greeting each other and sharing their stories around. The food served is not what matters. It is the people's stories that are dominant around the table. In this image, it is true that the church cannot be pictured as simply a family, or a sheepfold, or a banquet. The church needs all the images mentioned above in order to be perceived meaningfully according to the believers' imagination. One may also find the necessity of having such family meal in other meetings of the church as a community. Not every meeting should be filled with agendas and programmes in order to be meaningful for the believers. Most meetings might have been unforgettable not because of the agendas, but because of the togetherness interpreted freely and familially by the members.

In assessing this and the images related to this series, we would like to allude to a number of biblical images of the church, namely, '*the wedding feast*', '*flock*', and '*household of God*'.[20] From the image 'wedding feast', especially the one referred to in Mark 2:19, the believers' presence in the church is closely related with the opportunity to share in the heavenly gifts and to be united in an intimacy with God. The atmosphere of *joy* colouring this community is caused by the presence of the bridegroom among them. This opportunity is celebrated by the members unrestrainedly and openly, and even in spite of the rules that might simply thwart the experiences of felicity. When pictured

as a 'wedding feast', the church is, no matter what, an event of feast. The celebration of the *Eucharist* is a vivid manner of experiencing the church as a wedding feast. There is no other reason that is more appropriate to engage oneself in such feast than the enjoyment in the presence of the Lord given and shared as food to the believers. There is not much initiative of the believers expected in this communality except of being there, sharing with one another God's gifts. The second biblical image, the '*flock*', stirs up the tones of *safety* and of no fear among the believers. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). The church illustrated as a flock gives its members assurance for being together under the protection of Jesus Christ as God's appointed shepherd. This flock belongs to God. It should not be afraid of anything because God is doing this out of God's own pleasure. There is a touch of eternal *covenant* in this image, reminding the members that the community will continue to exist because the kingdom is given to them. The third biblical image, '*household of God*' (Hebrews 3:1-6; 8:1-13), may contribute a more universal meaning of the term 'family', especially when this image is linked to the biblical patterns in the Old Testament. The church as a 'household of God' is composed of all the families of the earth.[21] In other words, we cannot comprehend the church as a family without imagining all the families in the world that are also nourished by God, irrespective of their differences and convictions. Imagined in this sense, this biblical image should provide a basic framework to view and link other church images in this series, namely, that the church symbolises the *unity* of all the families in the world invited to take part in the joy of God's presence.

These biblical images add to the image of the church as a 'family meal' by contributing the tones of sharing in God's gifts in joy, of assurance and protection in the eternal covenant, and of universal connectedness with all the families of the earth. The freedom and social openness colouring this human encounter among the believers are consummated with a spiritual joyfulness and an awareness of God's universal gifts. The image 'family meal' can become the believers' interpretation of these biblical images insofar as it helps them connect their familiality with God's concerns to all the families in the world, namely, through God's gifts, protection, and nourishment. Thus related, it may be of help for the Christian communities to extend their experiences of being God's family and to proceed with their ecclesial tasks towards all other families. We might have construed that this series of images appertains to the content similarity (a) *being God's new family*.

The *second* observation concerning the believers' *aim* of getting together

in the church may give rise to an image of the church as **[14]** a **'sanctuary of God's Word'**.[22] What appears to be the key intention of the believers in this image is their thirst to listen to the Word of God, which was one of the options provided in the questionnaire receiving the strongest response. Notwithstanding the tendency among the believers in Java to listen to the Word in church services rather than to read the bible by themselves, this intention of getting together in the church for God's Word may unearth another side of their interpretations about the church. The church regarded mainly as a place to listen to God's Word might be closely related to their daily images about the church meetings and activities. When an activity or a meeting is said to be in relation to the church, the believers would think of the reading of the Scriptures. An ecclesial meeting without referring to the Scriptures would be unthinkable, since it would be the same as any other social meeting. Thus, we can imagine that for the believers an ecclesial encounter entails the wish to know what God has to say to them in this getting together. However, the believers' responses on the question might allude to the church as a 'place' rather than an event, given that the church was not described beforehand in the question. It means that outside this 'place' the believers still can see the other aims of being church. These other aims of being church can be found in the other answers in this observation, namely, 'to learn to love others', 'to pray together' and 'to confess sins'. One option receiving the least response, i.e., 'to earn a living', might have been considered irrelevant to the context. The three other aims above can expand the image of the church as a sacred place to its meanings as a community and a ritual. At the same time, these aims also bring forth different aspects of being present in the church. *Listening* to the Word of God is the key intention of the believers to be present in the church, but they also realise that this should lead them towards the practical ways of how to love others, of how to pray together and be reconciled with one another. By imagining the church as a 'sanctuary of God's Word' we would like to highlight not only the *liturgical* aspect of the church, but also its *moral*, *devotional*, and *communal* aspects interpreted in the light of the Word. For the believers, the church is a sacred place thanks to the presence of the Word, which makes the other dimensions feasible in their lives.

The church image incorporating these dimensions can be discussed with the help of the biblical image '*the Holy Temple*'.[23] What makes the temple holy is the presence of God in it. However, it is meaning is not entirely physical, since it is been made not by human hands (Acts 17:24). Each believer's body is God's temple and it is holy because the Spirit dwells in it (I Cor. 3:16-17).

Not only every believing person is seen as a holy temple, but also the church as a "whole structure" of believers is "joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). It is interesting that the church here is described as a structure which is *growing* into a holy temple. The church as God's holy temple is not a static place or entity. It is a spiritual house in the process of the making, and the believers are the "living stones" built into it by offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God though Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:5). This image, then, may lead our path of imagining the church as holy temple from the focus on the physical appearance to its spiritual nature insinuated by the gospel of John. The fourth evangelist sets forth the future of God's temple by referring to the hour when everyone will worship the Father "not on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21). The movement from the physical to the spiritual in this biblical image may revise the tendency to view the church as merely a place of worship for the believers. Being members of the church as God's holy temple is in fact a process of constructing a spiritual community or even a *spiritual presence* from the living stones which are the faithful themselves. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone to whom these living stones are joined. We may be convinced that the strength of this 'structure' will be uttermost when the visible presence of the believers is also united in their spiritual presence before God. When we relate this biblical image with the church image as 'sanctuary of God's Word', we may discover its *event-making* character of the former towards the latter. In Paul S. Minear's words, "the church is not the temple, but it is those who enter that sanctuary."[24] The believers who are listening to the Word of God are the church entering the sanctuary of God's presence. Walking through this holy path will bring the spiritual consequences, that is, to learn to love each other, to pray together as a community, and to be reconciled with one another and with God. What should be developed among the believers in Java would be their ways of being present spiritually as church in their daily encounters. If the church is not simply a physical place to get together in the community, then it should be the believers' presence in the world that makes the community a sanctuary of God's Word.

We also can refer this image of getting together to the church image '*members of Christ*'[25] as Paul delineates in I Cor. 6:12-20. This image primarily refers to the believers' bodies as members of (the body of) Christ. What might be beneficial to our discussion in this image is Paul's emphasis on the oneness of spirit of those joined to the Lord as his members (v. 17). Through a series of images depicting the believers as bodies that have been sanctified by God in Christ (I Cor. 5:1 to 6:11), Paul seems to illustrate the church as a

spiritual congregation of believers, but this congregation is no longer their own but God's (cf. v. 19). We may catch an important tone of this image in the *self-giving* of the believers to God once they are united in Christ. They are made one spirit in Christ, and thus they will be changed by his words and deeds spoken and circulated among them. The church as a sanctuary of God's Word in this sense looks like a place for the believers to devote themselves to God no longer as their own but as members of Christ. As a people now belong to Christ, the believers are willing to be changed by every word of God conveyed to them in the church. Here we might have found that the sequence of images above points to the content similarity (b) *communal transformation*, with some emphases on the spiritual presence and the self-giving of the members in the church community.

The *third* observation under the section contextual images of our survey concerns the vitality of the church in Java from the perspective of the believers. Anchored on their greatest support on the church's openness to all races and nations, we can imagine the church in this series of images as **[15]** an **'open house'**.[26] We need to refer back to the nature of this question which points to the church's survival till the end of the world. The local believers may have sensed that the church's existence in Java should not be taken for granted. There must have been unspoken assessments among the believers that their responses to this question should be taken into account. We know that when openness becomes an issue, there might be a problem of exclusiveness in the church. It is interesting to notice that this open attitude is emphasised by the believers over the needs for the church to improve itself, to care to the weak, to accommodate local culture and to fight for the oppressed. These calls are by no means insignificant. However, the openness towards races and nations seems to be necessitated in order to implement the other calls. Be that as it may, there might be a consequence that the church will have to carry on its tasks in relation with the society in the spirit of openness. It cannot, for instance, care only for the weak who are its own members. It will need to improve itself concerning the policies related with people of other races and religions. It will have to accommodate the cultural values by first listening to the local cultures, and also fight for the oppressed by considering the perspectives of those responsible for the overwhelming situation. The church in this image will look like a 'house of dialogue' with no window or door. It is like a lounge open to everyone, but yet everyone knows that this is a place belonging to God. Many Christians would think that this is an impossible place, given the exceptionally difficult situations with regard to plurality they encounter everyday in Java. However, what seems to be wished

by the believers from the church with this open attitude is the willingness to engage in *dialogue*. Hospitality would seem to be easier to employ towards friends, but we should ask, then, what credit is that to us? (cf. Luke 6:32-34). Thus an image of the church as an open house should basically motivate its members also to welcome people of different races and religions into dialogues, rather than to be concerned about their own internal problems. The problems of those people are also the problems of the Christians. This openness should lead the church towards other cultures and nations. We can mark the accentuation of the 'synthetic' ('prehending') function of imagination in this image. This image mirrors the tendency of the imagination to hold diversities through dialogues—something we mentioned above as an 'inclusive imagination' or, in Peter C. Phan's phrase, a 'dialogical imagination'.[27]

To put this image in conversation with the gospel, we would need the biblical image of '*the vineyard*'. However, we cannot instantly associate the church with the vineyard.[28] This image is first of all an illustration of how God is dealing with God's people, given that the stories (Matt. 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16) indicate the tenants' rejection to be responsible to the true owner of the vineyard. Yet this warning image still can bring in a challenge to realise that the church might be associated with the tenants who sometimes reject the true owner of the vineyard as the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 21:31). In this sense, this image actually can serve as a critique towards the church's members and leaders to be aware that they are just the tenants of the vineyard that might be the world they are now working in. If they cannot be trusted in building the Kingdom of God in this world, new tenants will be installed to replace them. There is no guarantee that the new tenants will be better than the former, and thus this image is a test for the church in different contexts and periods. The church imagined as a vineyard can challenge its members to be open to the coming of people from different backgrounds into their midst. While this may not always create an ideal situation among them, there is still a chance that the believers' welcoming attitude may reveal the church's particular aspects of inclusivity. If that is true, we may find a learning aspect of this situation through the believers' openness towards other people to come in the church's playground. Another biblical image that may be helpful to enhance the church image of an 'open house' is '*building on the rock*' which is explicitly related to the church (Matt. 16:18-19).[29] Here the church is said to be built by Jesus himself on the Rock which is Peter. This church will not be defeated by the powers of hell. It is worth to note, though, that this image is soon followed by the phrase about "binding and loosing"

with regard to the authority given by Jesus to Peter. This phrase may metaphorically allude to the situation that the church as Jesus' own will be protected by that authority throughout its ventures in this world. The image of the church as building on the rock suggests its *perseverance* in the midst of the most challenging situations it may wrestle with.

The first biblical image ('vineyard') can augment the image 'open house' in supporting the welcoming character the church should attend to, albeit through the challenging situations. The church is seen in relation with the world, which does not belong to its members but has to be cultivated to produce good fruits of the Kingdom of God. The church members will be assessed by the true owner whether they can be trusted also in face of the plurality of religions and races of the world. This plurality is a fact and should be encountered openly by the Christians instead of be countered with resistence. Thus, an opening gesture towards people of different races and religions could be one of the ways for the church is responsible to God, the true owner of the vineyard. The second biblical image is also advantageous in this discussion, since it gives the church a kind of divine assurance, that is, that the powers of hell shall not prevail against it. The church has been founded by Jesus Christ and is owned by him that it should not be afraid of being open towards all nations and races. The power of binding and loosing is the prerogative of the Lord but entrusted to the church leaders. It sheds light to the eschatological reality of the church as a building on the earth but at the same time a heavenly 'building' founded and owned by the Lord. The church's efforts to be open to all peoples in the world would mirror God's will to build God's Kingdom in the world. The sequence of images above could be listed in line with the content similarity (c) *church's inclusivity* with the emphases on the readiness to dialogues and the courage to face the challenging situations resulting from the open attitude.

The *fourth* observation pertains to the image of a church leader.[30] Five out of seven images received moderate responses ('father', 'counsellor', 'teacher', 'mother', 'friend'—listed according to percentage), while two appeared insignificant to the believers ('king' and 'doctor'). A church image that can be derived from these preferences to the figure of the leader would be **[16]** an 'assisted community'. This construction is based on the fact that the preferred images show the believers' tendency towards the condition of being supervised (by a father), encouraged (by a counsellor), taught (by a teacher), nurtured (by a mother), and accompanied (by a friend). It is true that the image 'father' received stronger response compared to the other. However, considering its only fair percentage, there must have been

conscientious reflections among the believers whether this image was really an wished or 'ideal' image of church leader. On the other hand, a reciprocal consideration of the five images above may have been sufficient for us to describe that an image of the church could be derived from the characters of a community led by a leader of those characters. We can see that the tendency among the believers in Java still leans towards *supervision* or *protection* ('father'), though there is an awareness that this character should be more coloured by sympathetic *assistance* ('counsellor' and 'teacher') and warm *accompaniment* ('mother' and 'friend'). A church community marked with these characters would be like a band of believers who want to be assisted through the process towards faith maturity. This community may not stand by itself and may be easily confused when there is no leader among them. We might want to compare this condition with our discussion about a 'faithful dependence' above.[31] The believers need a leader, and this requirement to some extent may turn into a sort of dependence that can be interpreted positively or negatively. This sort of community can be very much influenced by the *charism* of its leader. We can imagine that the members of such community may appear devotional and obedient in their spiritual expressions, albeit possibly less communicative and less initiative in their meetings. One of the required attempts to improve this condition would be to encourage the laity to be more active as facilitators in the meetings.

Corresponding to this image, we would need the biblical images '*followers*' and '*disciples*'[32] to illuminate some constructive insights. These images refer to the activity of the community in following and learning from Jesus as a leader and a teacher. In the gospels, the disciples are often described as following Jesus. The disciples are connected to the teacher and as followers they are related to the one they are following, although this does not hinder us from imagining the relationships that grow among the disciples themselves. What is significant from Jesus' teaching concerning this discipleship is that the *loyalty* to him as the teacher ought to be applied to other disciples as well.[33] It is clear from his words: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matt. 25:40). On the other hand, the significance of being the followers of Jesus lies in the *boldness* to be on his side. This is obvious in his challenge: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). At this point, these images may have enriched the image of the church as an 'assisted community' by extending the believers' loyalty to the other believers and calling out the church members to have courage to take initiatives with all the risks. Being a community of disciples and followers of

Jesus Christ means a deepening of the sensitivity among the members to the extent that they can find Jesus' charism within each other. Discipleship will need one's willingness to trust oneself in the other. The danger of being an 'assisted community' is that the members may be accustomed to wait for the instructions of the leader. There may be some bias in serving and pleasing the leader more than anyone else. The biblical images 'followers' and 'disciples' want to adjust the communal image by placing the initiatives on the members and not only towards the leader. Faithful obedience and devout service should be carried on among the disciples as already shown by the Teacher when he washed the feet of his disciples. "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). We may now realise that a discussion about the images of preferred church leader can lead us to a deeper reflection towards a more mature community of disciples.

The previous images can be identified based on their contents within the similarity (e) *communal partnership*. In this context, the relationships between the members and the leaders are directed towards a more communal partnership. If the church pictured as 'priesthood' in [10] above emphasises the faithful dependence, the church as an 'assisted community' accentuates the leader's charism and the believers' loyalty to one another in the community. These characteristics do not have to lead the community to become plainly receptive in various matters. On the other hand, these accents corroborate the cohesiveness of the community especially in discipleship and leadership.

The *fifth* observation in the survey turns our attention to the imagined relationships between the church and the local culture. Considering the believers' responses to the question about a church befitting the local culture, we may come up with an image of the church as **[17]** a **'flexible body'**.[34] This image is derived mainly from the answer with greatest percentage, that is, that the church should be capable of adjusting itself to the local culture. This extraction, however, does not intend to neglect the complementariness of the other three options which may be read as alternate responses in line with this image albeit in different contexts. The church's readiness to integrate Christian values into the local cultures, for example, can be seen as an interpretation of its attitude to adjust itself to the culture. This integrating effort might best be seen in line with the church image as a 'low-profile person' discussed earlier. Even so, the church's flexibility should not fail its responsibility to maintain the faith of the believers as Christians. Hence, the church as a flexible body must refer to Christ as its 'head', so as to assess

whether some local customs are still in line with the Christian faith. The believers' moderate responses to this function of the church towards the culture cannot be ignored. When necessary, the church would be required to correct the errors in the cultural traditions. This degree of flexibility of the church as a body should be imagined in the context of the believers' view concerning the image of the church befitting the local culture in Java. The church portrayed in this image may encourage a respectful relationship between the church communities and the society. For the believers, this image may also open a necessary space to weigh up their presence as church members and as members of the society.

Two biblical images can be constructive to this image, that is, the '*unleavened bread*'[35] and '*the new humanity*'.[36] The *first* image is derived from Paul's saying about unleavened bread as contrasted with the old yeast of malice and evil. "Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened" (I Cor. 5:7). From the context of Israel's deliverance from the Egyptian bondage celebrated in the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread, Christians find their deliverance from the bondage of sin in the Messiah. The church imagined as unleavened bread points to its being redeemed by Christ, the Paschal Lamb (v. 7). By reminding to the historical deliverance in Christ, this image has an imperative character of leading the church to become unleavened bread, an *eschatological* promise of the church's redemption at the end of the days. The contribution of this image to the church imagined as 'flexible body' would be that the church's relationship to the society and the local cultures must be *transforming* rather than simply 'converting', particularly because the biblical image presupposes an anticipation of the future. This image also adds to the image of the church 'flexible body' an awareness that this journey will take time. It is flexible in the sense that the church will take a long path of its own transformation before being able to change the culture and the society. The second biblical image, '*the new humanity*', is derived from Col. 3:9-10 and Eph. 4:22-24. The Christians seen in this image are stripped off of the old self and clothed with the new self, which is a renewal according to the image of the creator. The new humanity put on to the believers who belong to Christ signifies a continuing renewal in the mind that chooses true righteousness and holiness. It also reveals a new solidarity among the human race that was not possible due to corruptions and delusions (Eph. 4:22), but now made possible by Jesus Christ. The advantage of this image to the church imagined as 'flexible body' is that it gives *hopes* to the believers *towards a new solidarity* between the church and the culture, between the Christians and the representatives of the local culture and the society. Integration of

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Christian values in the local customs, in this sense, will have to start with this solidarity.

The believers' wish that the church is capable of adjusting itself and integrating the Christian values in the local cultures may hint us that these images can be discussed according to the content similarity (b) communal transformation. It is obvious that their accents would be about the hope for a new solidarity and the eschatological condition to which the church will take its path in the history. The church image of a 'flexible body' tries to cover the believers' responses concerning the type of a church that can closely befit the cultures in Java. We may have seen that this image would refer back to the tasks of the believers and their leaders in relationship with the sociocultural realities. Contextual interpretations of this image will be needed on the local level considering that these realities also may change in the future.

Epilog

This writing was not designed to be an exegetical one. Nor was it meant to be an analysis on the biblical aspects of the church. My explorations were much based on the surveys among the Catholics in the two parishes in Java, and mostly concerning the content of the believers' interpretations of the church in their own sociocultural realities. I have acknowledged the roles of the relevant 'biblical' images throughout this research so as to assess the believers' 'cultural' images in the context of the local church. These re-interpreted images of the church were valuable to reconsider the content and themes in catechesis. The materials I have elaborated in this research might be of great help for those concerned about catechesis in Java due to the perceptibility of the images and the availability of the biblical images which corroborate the believers' cultural images. There have been some similarities of the imagerial contents. These similarities are about (a) being God's new family, (b) communal transformation, (c) church's inclusivity, (d) daily spiritualities and (e) communal partnership. Having discovered these similarities, I want to leave them open for further discussions on catechesis and on the larger context of ecclesiology in Java.

Endnotes:

[1] See point (1) in Hadrianus Tedjoworo, "Being Sundanese and Javanese Cultural Persons and Church Members," *Melintas* (Vol. 27, No. 3, Desember 2011), 246.

[2] Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Louisville, Kentucky:

Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 [orig. 1960]), 171-172; hereafter quoted as *Images*.

3   *Images*, 31-32.

4   See point (2) in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*, 247.

5   *Images*, p. 42-43.

6   *Ibid*.

7   *Images*, 38-39.

8   See point (3) in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*, 248.

9   See Q41.

10   See Q16.

11   *Images*, 130.

12   *Images*, 131.

13   See point (4) in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*, 249-250.

14   *Images*, 158-159.

15   The believers' criticism of the tendency towards formalistic relationship can be seen in their responses to Q29 and Q36.

16   *Images*, 64-65.

17   See Q46 in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*, 251-253.

18   Cf. the existing 'local spirituality' phrased '*Berkah Dalem!*' that is very popular among the Catholics in Ganjuran. '*Berkah Dalem!*' is in fact an abridgment of the longer expression '*Berkah Dalem Gusti!*' which literally means "Lord's Blessing (be with you)!" The word '*Dalem*' (Jav. pronoun like 'his' or 'your') is usually used to address a second person or a third person in conversation. Thus, a Javanese would talk to someone respected very much by addressing him or her with '*panjenengan dalem*', which in English simply translated to 'you'. However, the word '*dalem*' can also refer to a third person mentioned in conversation by '*salira dalem*' (Jv. 'his' or 'her' self). When the latter is used to refer to God, the first character will be capitalised as in '*Dalem*'. In this way, a Javanese do not have to mention the title '*Gusti*' (Jv. 'Lord') or '*Allah*' (Jv. 'God') in conveying the Lord's blessing to a second person encountered, but simply "*Berkah Dalem!*".

19   Cf. the 'evocative' function of imagination. In making distinction of Joh Henry Newman's 'realising' and 'prehending' imagination, Merrigan says that "in the case of realizing imagination, attention is focused on the fact as grasped or apprehended (imaged). Viewed in this respect, imagination is primarily an *evocative* power"; Terrence Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991), 51-52.

20   See *Images*, 56-57, 84, 165.

21   Cf. *Images*, 166.

22   See Q47 in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*,253-254.

23   *Images*, 96-98.

24   *Images*, 99.

25   *Images*, 178-182.

26   See Q48 in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*, 254-255.

27   Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 197.

28   *Images*, 43-44.

29   *Images*, 50-52.

[30] See Q49 in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*, 256-257.
[31] Cf. [10].
[32] *Images*, 145 and further.
[33] *Images*, 147.
[34] See Q50 in Tedjoworo, *art. cit.*, 257-258.
[35] *Images*, 35-36.
[36] *Images*, 113-114.

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