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TEACHING THEOLOGY

A Ministry with a Mystagogy

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The fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Loyola School of Theology is an auspicious occasion, a *kairos*, to resolutely face the future with the boldness engendered by the Christian faith. It is an opportune time to offer a constructive critique of the way *theology is done* in most theological institutions. This is dealt with in the first section of this article. This critical appraisal enables the schools of theology to articulate better with the context of Asia. The second section explains the megatrends in the Asian context and describes the ecclesial vision offered by the 2012 Plenary Assembly of the FABC in Vietnam. With the ecclesial vision, the final section postulates that teaching theology needs to be regarded as a ministry that involves a mystagogy.

1. Constructive Appraisal

Human civilization has crossed the threshold of the Mystical Age after leaving behind the era of the Mental Age.[1] The dawn of this mystical age offers immense possibilities for humankind to maneuver

[1]See Frank X. Tuoti, *The Dawn of the Mystical Age: An Invitation to Enlightenment* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1997) and Kathleen Coyle,

the gradual shift to cosmocentricism. The mystical age is an opportune time (*kairos*) for theological institutions to realize that "we are people of the quantum leap!"[2]

This gradual shift to cosmocentricism calls into question the entrenched excessive anthropocentricism in the mainstream Eurocentric sciences, religions, and theologies. The entrenchment in the sciences amounts to a modern enslavement within the "iron-clad logic"[3] of what Pierre Bourdieu[4] calls the two extremes of rationality, namely "dogmatic rationalism" and "nihilistic irrationality."

1.1 Mainstream Theological Discipline

The enslavement of the mainstream theological disciplines calls for certain reflexive introspection and honest evaluation. First, is the latent and manifest "disdain and disbelief" in "popular spirituality" or "the people's mysticism"[5] revealing something more systemic? For instance, have the ecclesiastical disciplines (not discounting the natural and social sciences) become so addicted to and enslaved by the subtle influences of positivistic rationalism that every effort is made to systematically relativize and sanitize the religio-cultural worldview on the sacredness of *anthropos* and *cosmos*? Second, has the excessive anthropocentricism inherent in these disciplines perpetuated the dualism that alienates humankind from the cosmos? Third, has this anthropocentricism unwittingly lent itself to the patriarchal forces that

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"Theology and the New Cosmology: A Quantum Leap in Theological and Spiritual Insight," *EAPR* 50:2 (2013): 189–205.

[2]Coyle, "Theology and the New Cosmology," 189; Tuoti, *The Dawn of the Mystical Age*, 3.

[3]Francis, *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home), 108.

[4]Pierre Bourdieu, "Postscript," in Pierre Bourdieu, et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 629.

[5]Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World), 124.

epitomize men as the apex of power in order to control and exploit women and nature, and this to the detriment of the common good of the earth community and the inviolable sacredness of God's creation?

Prevalent in most religions and theologies is a dualism that theologians of EATWOT[6] are concerned about. This dualism has created a higher level that is "supernatural, divine, eternal, for which one must live, in the face of the lower level on which we live and that is natural, pernicious and full of temptation, ephemeral, a simple material setting of resources to be used."[7] The divine and sacred are confined to the level of "transcendence," thus emptying this world of divinity and sacredness. Theologies speak of a heavenly salvation after death that consists in being delivered from this wretched body and the earth.

Institutionalized religions have to be liberated from such theological anthropocentrism that has alienated humankind from the earth and the cosmos. In this vein, the paper of EATWOT's International Theological Commission entitled "Toward a Work Agenda for Planetary Theology" urges that we

> really need to develop a theology with new foundations, which we have already begun. It is an *oiko*-centered theology that breaks with the old distinction between the natural and the "supernatural," and that undoes the strictly transcendental idea of divinity that de-sacralizes and empties the divine dimension of nature. It is a theology which dialogue[s] with deep Ecology, a theology that refuses to grasp reality as a "history of the salvation of humanity" and that goes beyond anthropomorphism in favor of an *oiko*-centrism.[8]

At the dawn of the Mystical Age that gradually supplants the Mental Age,[9] the context-specific mainstream theologies (the sciences

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[6]*Voices* 35:3–4 (July–December 2012). Voices is the theological Journal of EATWOT, an Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

[7]See *Voices*, 21–22.

[8]*Voices*, 20–21.

[9]Tuoti, *The Dawn of the Mystical Age*, 3.

and religions too) need to be enriched by the mystical traditions.[10] This mysticism is well articulated by Teilhard de Chardin:

> All around us, to the right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through. By means of all created things, without exception, the Divine assails us, penetrates us and molds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible whereas, in fact, we live steeped in its burning layers. As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, "the world, this palpable world, is, in truth, a holy place, and we did not know it."[11]

The cosmic sacredness that suffuses the *cosmos* and the *anthropos* will dissolve the distorted anthropocentricism and dualism prevalent in most religions and theologies.

The transition to cosmic mysticism also requires, as Diarmuid O'Murchu[12] opines, a transition from a theology that "emphasizes the patriarchal metaphysical characteristics of God as distinctive, other, remote, and superior" to a *thealogy* that "privileges immediacy, presence, embodiment, and indwelling." In *thealogy*, O' Murchu[13] adds, "the Goddess is perceived as a living body enlivening an embodied cosmos, the generative force for creativity and transformation" instead of as a person.[14]

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[10]In the same vein, Kathleen Coyle remarks, "Rahner continues to remind us that Christianity must recover its mystical tradition; otherwise it has nothing to offer the world. To recover our mystical tradition we need to be more conscious of the Trinitarian life, the core of our graced life which we share. He reminds us that religion without mystical depth is no religion at all" ("Theology and the New Cosmology," 202).

[11]Lorrenzo Carraro, "Mystic Fire," *World Mission* XXIV (February 2012), 36.

[12]Diarmuid O'Murchu, *In the Beginning was the Spirit: Science, Religion, and Indigenous Spirituality* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 161.

[13]O'Murchu, *In the Beginning was the Spirit*, 162.

[14]See O'Murchu, *In the Beginning was the Spirit*, 161–162.

1.2 Grounding Discourses and Apostolic Praxis in Mysticism

With this bedrock of inner experiences, the discourses of theology will not ring hollow. The concepts and the words do not merely convince the mind with arguments but also lead to personal transformation of consciousness, dispositions, and motivations. The emergent discourses will *resonate with* and *communicate afresh* such intimate experiences of the sacred. In the praxis of struggling alongside the victims of contemporary suffering, these encounters, according to Bourdieu,[15] "can be considered a sort of *spiritual exercise*"[16] that enables us to discern and understand how God is at work.[17] In the long run, these inner experiences change the way we view the world and the struggle of marginal communities because we realize that the spirit-power of God that suffuses the cosmos is at work through the marginal peoples. It is like a "double-agency" wherein the victims and those who are in solidarity with them are never alone in the struggle.

In the light of this "double-agency," working for human liberation will not end in dreaded drudgery. The weight of social suffering in the contemporary world will not weigh us down as though we are suffering

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[15]Bourdieu, "Postscript," 614.

[16]Bourdieu, "Postscript," 614.

[17]The full text of what Bourdieu states in his postscript warrants a full citation:

> Thus, at the risk of shocking both the rigorous methodologists and the inspired hermeneutic scholar, I would say that interview can be considered a sort of *spiritual exercise* that, through *forgetfulness of self*, aims at a true *conversion of the way we look at* other people in the ordinary circumstances of life. The welcoming disposition, which leads one to make the respondent's problems one's own, the capacity to take that person and understand them just as they are in their distinctive necessity, is a sort of *intellectual love*: a gaze that consents to necessity in the manner of the "intellectual love of God," that is, of the natural order, which Spinoza held to be the supreme form of knowledge.

See Bourdieu, "Postscript," 627–629.

from a certain "fatigue of meaning" when the struggle becomes frustratingly futile. With reference to the role of social science in the alleviation of the social sufferings of the marginalized, Bourdieu argues that, "contrary to appearances, the observation is not cause for despair: what the social world has done, it can, armed with this knowledge, undo."[18] In the light of this double-agency, the undoing is done through human assistance that becomes the very medium of God's intervention in the praxis of liberation in the contemporary world.[19]

Grounding the theological disciplines in the bedrock of mysticism can possibly position the Church to efficaciously articulate with what God is already actively doing in the context of Asia and boldly envision herself as the Church of Asia.

2. Context of Asia: Megatrends and Ecclesial Vision

Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, O.M.I., enumerates the megatrends of Asia in his paper entitled *The Call to New Evangelization: The Church in Asia in the Next 50 Years.*[20] The 2012 Vietnam Plenary Assembly of the

[18]Bourdieu, "Postscript," 614.

[19]Bourdieu believes in the importance of interviews and human intervention as he argues that,

> contrary to appearances, the observation is not cause for despair: what the social world has done, it can, armed with this knowledge, undo. In any event, what is certain is that nothing is less innocent than noninterference. If it is true that it is not easy to eliminate or even modify most of the economic and social factors behind the worst suffering, particularly the mechanisms regulating the labor and educational markets, it is also true that any political program that fails to take full advantage of the possibilities for action (minimal though they may be) that science can help uncover, can be considered guilty of nonassistance to a person in danger.

See Bourdieu, "Postscript," 629.

[20]Orlando B. Cardinal Quevedo, "The Call to New Evangelization: The Church in Asia in the Next 50 Years," *Landas* 30:1 (2016): 38.

FABC discerned and identified certain megatrends in Asia, to which must be added the geo-political power play between the U.S. as the dominant superpower and China as the emerging superpower in Asia.[21]

The same assembly also rearticulated and expanded the 1974 vision of Church.[22] Significant to this envisioning is the Final Message of the Assembly that speaks of the "Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in Asia," otherwise known as the "spirituality of New Evangelization."[23] This spirituality of the New Evangelization portrays as important various dimensions.[24]

In relation to Pope Francis' "*Assisian* contemplation,"[25] the spirituality of the New Evangelization needs to challenge the Church of Asia to be *a Church of cosmic mystics and mystical prophets* as the Church becomes interspiritually enriched in a continent that abounds in religious mystics and prophets of other faiths. Only with such a mystical presence will the Asian Church be able to bear the silent witness in credibly telling the story of Jesus in Asia.

3. Teaching Theology: A Ministry with a Mystagogy

The megatrends, the ecclesial envisioning, and the multi-dimensions of spirituality lead me to think more critically about

[21]In his article, Cardinal Quevedo opines that unless "the world's social, economic, and political order is radically transformed, the New Evangelization in Asia will be addressing these megatrends over the next fifty years" (Quevedo, "The Call to New Evangelization," 39.

[22]See Quevedo, "The Call to New Evangelization," 39.

[23]Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly, "Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in Asia," Final Message (Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam: Dec. 16, 2012), 4.

[24]*Ecclesia in Asia* 24, citing *Christi fideles laici* 32. See Quevedo, "The Call to New Evangelization," 40–41.

[25]Francis, *Laudato Si'* 125.

teaching theology at the Loyola School of Theology under the Asian Theology Program.

Teaching theology should call our attention to what Cardinal Versaldi alerted us to—the presence of the divine in our cognitive exercises.

> In the Western world it is widely held that only positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on it are universally valid. Yet the world's profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures.[26]

As God's presence in cultures is antecedent to the arrival of the Church,[27] it is important for LST to be attentive to how God is active in the plural cultures of the *formandi* who come from different parts of Africa, Oceania, and Asia. LST is like an oasis and the *formandi* are like rivulets from various springs flowing into the oasis. They enrich the learning at LST by contributing different streams of religious experiences, understandings, and presumptions, i.e., their personal history including personal experiences, insights, questions, etc. in their lives and ministries. This intercultural enrichment presumes that the *formandi* "do not actually join a training program but [that] a training program joins their process."[28] The presupposition is that the riches of these springs will overflow to enrich the life of the oasis.

Furthermore, Cardinal Versaldi, citing Pope Francis, calls "on theologians to carry out this service as part of the Church's saving mission. In doing so, however, they must always remember that the

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[26]Versaldi, "Leading and Serving through Theology: 50 Years After Vatican II," 16, quoting Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to München, Altötting and Regensburg: Meeting with the Representatives of Science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg* (September 12, 2006).

[27]Society of Jesus, General Congregation 35, Decree 4, No. 17. A copy is available at http://www.sjweb.info/35/documents/Decrees.pdf.

[28]See Perttu Salovaara & Arja Ropo, *Embodied Learning Experience in Leadership Development* (Finland: School of Management, University of Tampere, 2013), 202.

Church and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology."[29] His emphasis resonates with the call of the Asian bishops to articulate with the ecclesial mission of the Church that is bound inseparably to the vision and spirituality of the Asian Church.

Just as spirituality is the indispensable matrix of the FABC's ecclesial vision, so is spirituality to theology. Cardinal Versaldi, citing the International Theological Commission, postulates that theology "is characterised by a distinctive spirituality" and that "[i]ntegral to the spirituality of the theologian are: a love of truth, a readiness for conversion of heart and mind, a striving for holiness, and a commitment to ecclesial communion and mission."[30] This postulation on theology certainly articulates with the aspirations of the 2012 Vietnam Plenary Assembly of the FABC.

At the same time, Cardinal Versaldi insists on the place of *sophia* in theology for reasons that theology as wisdom "is able to integrate aspects of the faith both studied and experienced and to transcend in the service of God's truth the limits of what is strictly possible from an intellectual standpoint."[31] Most insightful of all is the indelible remark of Cardinal Versaldi that "theologians must be persons of prayer"[32] since theologians "are called by Christ to follow him, to walk with him, and to rediscover that 'history therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity.'"[33]

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[29]Versaldi, "Leading and Serving through Theology: 50 Years After Vatican II," 20, quoting Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 133.

[30]Versaldi, "Leading and Serving through Theology: 50 Years After Vatican II," 21, quoting the International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (2011), n. 93.

[31]Versaldi, "Leading and Serving through Theology: 50 Years After Vatican II," 22, quoting the International Theological Commission, *Theology Today*, n. 95.

[32]Versaldi, "Leading and Serving through Theology: 50 Years After Vatican II," 22.

[33]John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason [1998]), n. 12.

Given the interrelation of theology with missiology and spirituality, I posit that the teaching of theology has to be a *ministry* in which the lecturers lend themselves more conscientiously to God for God to fulfill God's desires of forming the *formandi* in God's image so they may collaborate more effectively with God in what God is already actively doing in Asia. This ministry of teaching theology involves a mystagogy in which the lecturer guides the *formandi* in a contemplation of placing oneself in God's triune presence, becoming attentive to God's voice and the deepest passion, to the burning issues and challenges in the *formandi*'s heart.

In teaching *An Asian Contextual Theology of Sacred Sustainability*,[34] a mystagogy was introduced to the pastoral spiral for the course. This spiral began with a 2-night immersion-experience in the Aeta communities in Tarlac.[35] The critical and prayerful analysis done in class culminated in a contemplative moment of attending to what God is saying and already doing in the midst of the Aeta communities.[36] The theological reflection done in class is also interspersed with a discerning contemplative moment. I remembered guiding the *formandi* through an "incarnational contemplation"[37] of being taken up into the presence of the Triune God, gazing on the world of the Aeta communities. At the same time, the *formandi* are guided to be attentive to what God is saying by identifying the surging passion and the burning challenges/issues in their hearts. Each one was to identify what was deep down in his heart, be it poverty, environment, justice, etc.[38] After the prayer, the *formandi* were encouraged to correlate critically what was identified

[34]The course I offer is Theo 345.5: Religion, The Catholic Church, and Society: An Asian Contextual Theology of Sacred Sustainability. It is held every Wednesday, from 2:00–4:40pm, at Seminar Room 2, Loyola School of Theology.

[35]The immersion in the Aeta communities of Tarlac took place on Jan. 15–17, 2016.

[36]The guided prayer took place at the end of the session on March 2, 2016.

[37]Cf. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* 102.

[38]The guided prayer took place at the middle of the session on March 11, 2016.

in the guided prayer with relevant Bible passages as well as Catholic social and papal teachings.[39]

The course will culminate in a recollection in which the same mystagogy hopes to introduce the *formandi* to an experience of the *Assisian contemplatio*, an "awe-filled contemplation of creation"[40] that Pope Francis has ingeniously woven into *Laudato Si'*. This ingenuity serves to alert contemporary women and men of the need to "water the vast inner desert"[41] in human civilization with the dews of the contemplative and prophetic mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi.[42] This recollection aims to dispose the *formandi* to listen to God and what God is asking each of them to do for/with God and the marginal communities.[43]

Only the dews of mystical moments enable contemporary women and men in theological studies to awaken within themselves the insightful exhortation of Ali al-khawas: "There is a subtle mystery in each of the movements and sounds of this world. The initiate will capture what is being said when the wind blows, the trees sway, water flows, flies buzz, doors creak, birds sing, or in the sound of strings or flutes, the sighs of the sick, the groans of the afflicted."[44] In this mystical experience, the "distance between the creatures of the world

[39]The Bible passages and Catholic Social/Papal Teachings are given to the *formandi* in a paper entitled *Sacred Nature: Sustainable Life: Bible & Catholic Social Teachings*.

[40]Francis, *Laudato Si'* 125.

[41]Francis, *Laudato Si'* 217.

[42]See Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of the Creatures*, in R. J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Helimann, & W. J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York/London/Manila: New City Press, 1999), 113–114.

[43]May 11, 2016 is the day in the course when the *formandi* prays to understand what God is asking each of them to do for God and God's marginal people.

[44]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, footnote 159. See Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, ed., *Anthologie du soufisme* (Paris: 1978), 200.

and the interior experience of God" no longer exists.[45] In addition, neither does the distance between the cosmos and all things created and the mystical experience of God exist.[46]

This cosmic mysticism will be the basis for embodying a mystical prophetism that enables the *formandi* to be sensitive to the cries of the poor[47] and promote the sustainability of livelihood with dignity for the marginalized. This mystical prophetism will enable the *formandi* to be attentive to what God is desiring by discerning the aspirations, joys, and sorrows of the marginalized. After the prayerful discernment will the *formandi* be better disposed to collaborate with what God is already actively doing to ensure that the marginalized have a place in our common home.

Conclusion

The *kairos* is God's time calling for a human response. God has been faithfully accompanying the Loyola School of Theology. As a Jesuit institution of Asia, our remembrance of what we have done for Christ calls for a critical reappraisal of where we are so that we are grateful to God for what we are doing and what more we can do for the greater glory of God. Indeed, embarking on the pathway of envisioning how LST is leading and serving theology calls for teaching theology as a ministry with a mystagogy so that we can better respond to God's mission within the context of the megatrends, with the richness of the intercultural-religious-spiritualities as a globalized Church of Asia.

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[45]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, footnote 159.

[46]This kind of cosmic mysticism is what I describe as "cosmicism" in which the pray-er is drawn into a felt-experience that God is all in all (Eph. 4:6) in the cosmos and that this "allness" is in creation and creation is in this "allness." In other words, the "allness" (of God) is the "allness" (of creation) and vice versa. Dualism no longer exists.

[47]Francis, *Laudato Si'* 46.

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Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, O.M.I., D.D., earned his degree in Philosophy from San Jose Seminary, Quezon City, in 1960. After finishing his STB and MA in Religious Education at the Oblate College, Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C., he was ordained a priest of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on June 5, 1964. He was made the Bishop of Kidapawan in 1980, Archbishop of Nueva Segovia in 1986, and Archbishop of Cotabato in 1998. A peace advocate and a powerful voice for interreligious dialogue in the southern Philippines, he co-founded the Bishops-Ulama Conference of the Philippines in 1996. He was elected President of the Catholic

Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) from 1999 to 2003, and of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) from 2005 to 2011. Pope Francis made him a Cardinal in the consistory of February 22, 2014.

Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, D.D., obtained a degree in psychology and then a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical Gregorian University. In 1976, he set up a diocesan family counseling center, of which he was director, and promoted the family apostolate. Subsequently he became president of the Piedmontese Federation of Christian Counselors. In 1980, he was invited to teach canon law and psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University while retaining some of his activities in the Archdiocese of Vercelli. He obtained the title of advocate at the Roman Rota, and then became a referendary in 1985 and a member of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura in 2007, while also teaching anthropology at the Studium of the Roman Rota. On April 4, 2007, he was appointed Bishop of Alessandria, and in 2011 he was named President of the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See. Benedict XVI appointed him Cardinal in the consistory of February 18, 2012, and Pope Francis appointed him Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education on March 31, 2015.

Nelson and Ma. Socorro Villafania were among the more than fifty lay individuals from different countries who participated in the Synod on the Family held last October 4–25, 2015. Nelson is collaborator at the Evangelion Foundation in Mandaluyong City; Maria Socorro is former lecturer in theology at the Assumption College in Makati City and works with the Salesian Sisters in the preparation of catechists.