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ARE THE CHURCH FATHERS RELEVANT IN A 21ST CENTURY INCULTURATED AND CONTEXTUALIZED ASIAN THEOLOGY?

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Abstract. Is Patristics still relevant in the 21st century? The paper states some factors for the decline of the popularity of Patristics in the 19th – 20th century, and while the Patristics ressourcement happened before Vatican II, but after Vatican II, Patristics studies dwindled. Faith and culture as ingredients of inculturation then and now, in the Church Fathers' era and the present era can become complementary in doing theology in Asia, as the importance of Patristics as examples of Tradition is recalled. How can Patristics still be relevant? An example is given from Tertullian's *Aduersus Marcionem,* where he argues against Marcion by citing Jesus' Transfiguration. Two terms singled out from the citations, *contubernium* (friendship) and *repromissio* (promise fulfillment), are rendered as *pagkakaibigan* and *katuparan ng pangako*, respectively, in an attempt to cross over to Asian theology in Tagalog. Having changed the circumstances, from the original context of *contubernium* and *repromissio* in the Biblical event itself, where both terms crossed over from the Old to the New Testament, Tertulian uses both terms to argue mainly in favor of unity of Scripture against Marcion's Scriptural ditheism. Another cross over is done from Tertullian's polemical context to a non-polemical context, that of *pagkakaibigan*

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(*contubernium*) and *katuparan ng pangako* (*repromissio*), where both terms are considered as two faces of love (*pag-ibig*). In this doing theology, Tertullian's sample lines, far from being out of place, act as a bridge in order to understand love in its facets of friendship and fulfillment of promises, and can even provide as a deepening of an understanding of the Transfiguration event as a historical event in Jesus' life which also teaches us the value of friendship and fulfilling promises. The paper hopefully invites the reader to discover and engage with the Church Fathers here and now.

Keywords. Patristics; Asian theology; Transfiguration; *contubernium; repromissio; ressourcement;* Tertullian; Marcion; friendship; promise; *pagkakaibigan; pangako*

Introduction

In this 21st century, where here at the Loyola School of Theology, for example, doing theology in context is a constant clarion call, *can Patristics again be relevant? And if so, how?* The present paper aims to answer both questions as it proposes an initial articulation of the possible collaboration between two historical epochs in Theology, one ancient, the other, contemporary; one from mostly west Asia (or Near East, depending on whose vantage point) and Europe, the other, from southeast Asia; one, quite not that popular nowadays, the other, taken up by everybody. Two but seemingly with the same basic underlying issues before them, *mutatis mutandis* regarding the specific issues for each era: about man, about the cosmos, and about God. Next, we try to describe the elements which make up the title, in order to enunciate the possibility of a twenty-first century Patristic repurposing.

Church Fathers

Who are the Church Fathers? Needless to say, the Church Fathers (from the second to the eighth centuries) are the persons who in the history of the Church and of theology have tried to verbalize and write on the Christian faith. Are the Church Fathers studied up to

now? On the one hand, in the curricula of most Catholic seminaries, an introduction to them and their writings (mostly the titles of their writings) exists, and is usually called *Patrology*. On the other hand, the Pontifical Patristic Institute *Agustinianum* in Rome offers postgraduate courses on the Licentiate and Doctoral degrees, on *Patristics,* which is a deeper study of the teachings of one or more Church Fathers, either author-centered or topic-centered. Few centers around the world, like the Pontifical Faculty of Theology at St. Augustine's Seminary, in Toronto, Canada, to date, offer specialized, post-graduate courses on Patristics.

Even though one of the theological movements which were instrumental in bringing about the fresh breeze which was to be Vatican II was the *ressourcement*, the going back to the sources, a theological *hugot* we may nowadays say with the Pinoy slang, there has been a general downhill drive in studying Patristics worldwide. What may have caused a dwindling of the number of those who are willing to study and learn Patristics, beyond the basic seminary course on Patrology? We can name a few, together with possible solutions.

First, a *negative, almost unspoken bias* against the Church Fathers, often labelled as "antiquated," "pre-Vatican II, " "too remote." This would sound ironic, since, as we have mentioned before, one of the movements before Vatican II was a ressourcement, to the sources of Theology, one of which was Tradition, a part of which was the legacy of the Church Fathers. The Church Fathers are often connected to Church Tradition. (Yves Congar, OP has written magnificently on "Tradition nnd Traditions," but we digress.) Tradition itself, in some sectors of the ecclesiastical academe is sometimes frowned upon, and is often classified mistakenly as Traditionalism or even radical Traditionalism. There is a famous Tagalog saying, "*'Pag gusto, maraming paraan; 'pag ayaw, maraming dahilan"* (If one wants, tactics abound; if one doesn't, excuses abound.) How does one address this bias? It seems that it is ultimately a question of human will and openness to venture into uncharted territory, "*baka naman puwede"* (it just might work).

Second, a *lack of linguistic preparation* for the teaching and study of the Fathers. Admittedly, a highly scarce number of people in the Church who study Greek and Latin (beyond the Greek alphabet and some Latin maxims!), except for those studying Scripture (be it Scriptures *per se* or Biblical Theology), has greatly contributed to the very, very few people studying Patristics. Neither is Patristic Latin like the Neo-Vulgate Bible, nor Patristic Greek like the Koiné Greek of the New Testament. Fewer still are those who know Syriac, for example, to read the Syriac Fathers in the original. So, what do we do now? One can perhaps start with the translations into the modern languages of some Patristic works, then, if there is time (although this may better be described as a long-term learning, or re-learning across generations), to learn Greek and Latin to be able to read the Church Fathers. On the other hand, classical Greek and Latin (referring especially, in this context, to non-Christian writings in Greek and Latin) seems to be starting to be of interest to more and more people, at least in the USA and in some countries in Europe. There are even onsite and online immersive courses both in classical Greek and classical Latin, and for the online courses and videos, there are plenty of resources in the Internet.

Third, an *ignorance of the importance and relevance* of the Church Fathers even in the third millennium. This may be partly due to the bias or bad publicity described above. And partly, too, because of the lack of exposure to Patristic texts, not only in the original, but even in any of the extant translations. What ought one to do then? After one's personal motivation is identified and clarified, one can search the Internet. In the World Wide Web, there are many educational videos on the Church Fathers in the English language, and as was mentioned above, one can start from there. Something very much connected to this is a seeming ignorance nowadays among the general reading populace of Christians about what is called *Patristic exegesis*, a very recent branch of Patristics which focuses on what the Church Fathers, or in a broader sense, the early ecclesiastical writers, have to say about Scriptural passages. Of course, the historico-critical method of Scriptural exegesis was of general use starting from the twentieth century, and it is certainly a very useful method. But does this mean, to use a verb famous nowadays, that using the historico-critical method

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means "cancelling" the Patristic exegesis, just because it has another methodology, and moreover, just because it is chronologically way earlier than the historico-critical method?

Fourth, an *lack of exposure to the sources and translations* thereof of the extant works of the Church Fathers, as have been mentioned above. However, there are more resources (in this context, in English) readily available now not only in the World Wide Web, but also in specialized programs (and apps!). It is never too late to start reading or watching or listening and getting to know the Church Fathers, their contexts, personalities and the context of their writings. There are many translations of the writings of the Church Fathers, mostly in European languages. In English, a series of Patristic Scriptural commentaries is published under the heading "Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture" edited by Thomas C. Oden (InterVarsity Press) which is, in fact, a wonderful ecumenical project.

Fifth, a *lack of opportunity* to explore the engaging connectivity between the culture during the time of the Church Fathers and the twenty-first century culture, inculturation and theology here in Asia. We will get back to this after we have described inculturation and theologizing in Asia today.

Culture, Faith, Inculturation

By inculturation, we usually understand a symbiosis of Christian faith and culture. When did inculturation begin? Of course, the present-day usage of the *term* "inculturation" began only in the twentieth century. However, this does not mean that inculturation only began in the twentieth century.

Why so? It is because culture is part of the human reality. There is culture because there is man. We can even say that man is a cultural being. But before we go on along this line, let us make a short digression by clarifying what we mean by culture.

Culture

When we say "culture," we do not have in mind primarily, say, "cultural dances, " like the *Tinikling* during the *Buwan ng Wika*. As is known, *cultura* means, cultivation, and its *scope* is everything man can do with the use of his awareness, knowledge and freedom. What are some *types* of culture? Culture is not only relatable to the arts (music, painting, sculpture, etc.) nor only to trade and craft (agriculture, aquaculture, pisciculture, etc.) but also to man's habitual acts (culture of studying, sports and recreation culture, political culture) and most importantly, man's habitual moral acts (culture of life, culture of death; here, we can perhaps offer "culture" as a synonym in the phrase "social structures of sin" to render it as "social cultures of sin"). We haven't included here, for brevity, what are called *subcultures*, which are more particular types of cultures. Suffice it to give a few examples: subculture/s in a Seminary, or among parish organizations, or within a religious Order.

Culture can also be related to a certain *country or continent*, and that is why we speak of Asian culture, European culture, Filipino culture, German culture, Mexican culture, Vietnamese culture, etc. Each culture can further be divided into subcultures, like for Filipino culture: Visayan subculture, Tagalog subculture, Ilocano subculture, etc. Looking into the Catholic Church, we can also see *intra-ecclesial* cultures and subcultures: for example, culture among parish choirs, or among parish organizations. So, in this sense, culture is almost synonymous with *group*. And this may give a *static* implication. In order to balance the situation, thereby giving it a *dynamic* dimension, and to mention another characteristic of a culture also based on its etymology, culture is *cultivation, repetition, development* of something, be it *material* or *immaterial or spiritual*.

To further characterize culture, and to underline something we have earlier affirmed, culture is *human*. It's interesting to note, perhaps, that both human and culture are related to the soil.

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Christian Faith

By "Christian faith," we mean the entire corpus of Christian belief as it is revealed by God, and is rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and transmitted through the centuries in the reflection on the faith which is Theology. Faith as an ingredient *sine qua non* in doing theology – with the help of God's grace, indeed – is also an ingredient *sine qua non* for the process of inculturation. And in relation to Christian faith, we can say that a person who does inculturation, if he or she is a Christian, it is basic for him or her to have faith. By having faith, we understand here what is classically called "supernatural faith," understood as *fides quae* (that is, the articles of faith we profess in the Christian Creeds) as well as the *fides qua* (our personal adherence to God, faith as a personal response to God's Self-Revelation). This is not the place to go over one by one all the articles of the Christian faith. However, what is important here is for the Christian to know and to love his or her Christian faith, before, during and after the process of inculturation. In the human experience of doing inculturation, whether it be on a dimension of discovery, of discernment, or of dialogue, of the other person's culture or of another group's or society's culture/s, indeed, a Christian might think, on the one hand, that a "neutral" attitude towards the faith is instrumental in order for the inculturation to be "objective," that is, free from any bias or pre-conceived idea. However, on the other hand, being "neutral" in the sense of "pretending not to be a Christian" may not help in the culturation. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean "not listening" to the other, as if one were to virtually cover one's mind and ears to other thoughts and feelings. Rather, I see no reason for a Christian to be aware of one's identity as a Christian, and at the same time, to be listening to the other, to the thou. Needless to say, inculturation does not mean imposing one's idea or beliefs to the other, even while being aware that in the past, there had been many instances of "forced Baptism," "forced indoctrination," and "proselytism" in the pejorative sense. But, this must not, however, mean going to the other extreme, that of nonchalance regarding one's faith. Again, balance is the key. There is no reason for one's Christian awareness of one's identity, to be incompatible with one's full listening to the other.

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Inculturation

We had said that while the term inculturation had started to be in use only in the twentieth century, inculturation, *de facto*, had been happening. God has been revealing His plan in actions nad in words (*gestis verbisque*, cf *Dei Verbum*, 2), not in an epistemological vacuum devoid of any concreteness and reality, but in *history*, that is, in a certain time and in a certain place, and therefore, in a certain *culture*.

We can also affirm that man is not only a historical being, but a cultural being. Culture and history mutually refer to one another, in the sense that what happens in a where and in a when (history) may be cultivated, encouraged, cherished, celebrated (culture).

We can consider inculturation as a kind of "*hugot*" between the Christian faith and culture, a symbiosis, "life with."

Inculturation implies a *mutual expression* between (Christian) faith and culture, be it through verbalization, or through visuals, for example. And this mutual expression calls for a *mutual listening* between faith and culture. But listening not merely to know what and how to reply, but listening in order to understand not only what is said, but also to grasp what remains unsaid, and ultimately, to behold the other with respect due to any person.

We can mention two general *types of settings or situations of inculturation*. A *pastoral setting of inculturation*, with "pastoral" taken in its original, literal meaning of relating culture to agriculture, shepherding, and a metaphorical meaning, as in "pastoral theology," "pastoral application or situation," covers preaching, learning an indigenous or foreign language, getting to know one's culture and another culture.

Another setting is an *academic setting of inculturation*, where one seeks to express (verbally or non-verbally) the symbiosis between the Christian faith and a certain kind of culture. This academic setting is mainly *theological*, but not exclusively so, since it is most advantageous to have an *inter-disciplinary setting* (*and approach*), including philosophy (which, in turn, includes a philosophy or philosophies of culture),

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sociology, history (especially of culture and religion, aside from the history of countries, continents, and Church History). When we speak of a *theological setting of inculturation*, we can perhaps make use of the outlines of the so-called "branches" of theology to map out the connections: Scripture, dogmatics, sacramentology, morals and spiritual theology, with the classical tripartite theological sources as an important support in each of the branches (Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium), and of course, the important tools in doing theology – languages (not only the "languages" in the sense of either ancient and modern languages, but also in the sense of the use of "language" as an important medium for doing theology), history (in the quadri-epochal aspects: Patristic, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary, with the addition of national or continental ecclesiastical histories, like Philippine Catholic Church History, etc.; and, last but not the least, the so-called current events, which are an important factor in discerning the application of the Church's social doctrine), sacred arts, human psychology, anthropology and experience. An *inter-disciplinary setting of inculturation* is usually to connect further the already intra-theological (academic) inter-disiciplinary setting to an *extra-theological plural* (not to be confused with pluralist/ic) *setting* of different realities and worldviews: for example, sciences (natural and human), values, realities in mission and in sectors of the society (for example, persons in the fringes, migration, poverty, justice, with a long etcetera of social, political, moral and economic issues), other religions, other Christian denominations, non-theistic and agnostic expressions, post-Christian society.

What are some *methods* of inculturation? The following methods are meant to be considered simultaneously while doing inculturation. A primary method useful in doing inculturation is *mutuality*. Christian faith and culture both may and ought to listen to one another, since both are important in inculturation. There is a movement, borrowing from Martin Buber's lexicon, from the I to the thou and from the thou to the I, as well as from the I to the it, and from the it to the I; and finally, the movement from the I to the Thou, and the Thou to the I. Last, but not the last, from the I to the we (we may perhaps add, in both nuances: inclusive, *tayo*, and exclusive, *kami*). A second method

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connected with the first is *dialogue*. Dialogue is important, because it presents two important factors to take into account in the entire process of inculturation: *respect and openness*. A third method is to see and contextualize the first two methods in *synodality*, the *synodal method*. A fourth very important method for doing inculturation is made up of *five sub-methods*: *awareness, acceptance, purification, development, giving* (AAPDG). A fifth method is to consider the difference between *ideas and reality*, "expectation versus reality", as people would say nowadays. A sixth method is to always take into consideration *balance*, which is not to be understood as mediocrity, but the highest point between two extremes.

Asian Christian Theology Today

There are two main descriptions of theology in that subtitle: 1) theology in Asia, and 2) (theology in Asia) today. When we say "theology in Asia," it is a broad term encompassing both space (geographical location, whether literally or topically) and time (from Christian antiquity to now, the third millennium). Here is not the place to enumerate the Christian theologies in Asia (south Asia, southeast and east Asia, and also countries in the Middle East and the Near East) that have existed and exist up to now. Maybe an example will suffice, not because it is 100% identical to other cultures, but that it is a phenomenon of a part of doing mission, a part of which is to introduce and to explain the Christian faith, which in turn is what doing theology is, or expressing the faith in a certain part of Asia: the development of the first *Vocabvlario de lengva tagala* in Castillian Spanish and Tagalog, by Fray Pedro de San Buenaventura, O.F.M., published in Pila, Laguna, in 1613, but had been a work in progress from the 1590s. It was an exercise of comparative lexicography, now within a new branch of linguistics called missionary linguistics. Here, one can discover many things about the late 16th c. (or even earlier) of southern Tagalog culture in a *bayan* or town, from where the friars learned first the indigenous language, and through that, they tried to communicate and meet the people, and tried to make themselves understood, and also tried to communicate to them the Christian faith. An exercise in inculturation in a part of the Philippines. Centuries before the phrase

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"Filipino theology" was even coined. Admittedly, it was not that there were theological treatises in Tagalog already at that time, but the Tagalog lexicon was and is a rich, fertile ground for sowing the seeds of the faith, the seeds of the Word (*logoi spermatikoi*). To this miniscule but important example we can add the many other theologies about Asia and in Asia, both by Asians and non-Asians, in a myriad of languages, also both Asian and non-Asian.

Can Patristics Still Be Relevant Nowadays? A Case in Point

This is an attempt to answer the second question formulated at the start of this paper: If Patristics can still be relevant in the 21st century, how? Maybe a starting point may be an event in Jesus' life as recorded in the Gospels. Like the Transfiguration.

Jesus' Transfiguration, early on in the Latin-speaking part of the early Church, has had a very important role in answering to one particularly tough yet interesting heterodox teaching prevalent at that time, towards the end of the second century *anno Domini*: dualism, and precisely, in one of dualism's forms: Gnosticism, that is, a teaching which preaches salvation not through practicing virtues but by knowing the secret passwords of salvation. Who would at once deny that salvation is a hot topic, then and now? Who would not want to be saved? The thing is that, given that the yearning for salvation is legitimate, the next question would be: how would one be saved? What must one know, and believe?

Here is where Marcion's teaching is crucial. One of the teachings Marcion taught which, on the one hand, was not mainstream, orthodox Christian teaching, but on the other hand, was not quite easy to pinpoint where the falsehood was, since it seemed to be based on Scripture, at first. Marcion's main contention as far as God is concerned was that in Scripture, the God depicted in the Old Testament was a cruel God, unlike the God depicted in the New Testament, who for him was good. On the one hand, Marcion generally mentioned the instances in Scripture when God's actions were depicted in what would later

be called anthropomorphic terms, like being angry at humankind, so much so that He inflicted punishments on human persons who were erring. And on the other hand, Marcion praised the merciful God in the New Testament, who seemed not to do anymore the acts done by the God in the Old Testament. And so, it appeared that there were two gods! Dualism.

The person who confronted Marcion's teachings was the North African Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (Tertullian, for short) who, in his longest work, *Aduersus Marcionem* (Marc.), mentioned the Transfiguration event in order to refute the teachings of Marcion. To Marcion's attempts to divide or separate Scripture, Tertullian replies, using the Transfiguration event as the context, that there is unity in Scripture, shown by the familiarity among Christ and Moses and Elijah.[1] Not only this, but Tertullian, using the same unity argument, also manages to introduce unicity of God, when Tertullian asks what is more fitting to the Creator's Christ, than to manifest himself to those who preached about Him (i.e. Moses and Elijah)?[2] The very phrase "Creator's Christ" already implicitly unites the Old Testament (Creator) with the New Testament (Christ), thereby contrasting with Marcion's belief that the Creator had nothing to do with the Christ.

Regarding Moses' and Elijah's presence with the Christ, Tertullian says that Peter recognizes a legitimate intimacy (*contubernium*) among Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Tertullian employs a special word for intimacy, *contubernium,* a possibly more concrete description of the *familiaritas* among the Christ, Moses and Elijah mentioned above. It means that they did not just happen to be there, but they have a very close and unique relationship, as unique as the word chosen to depict the said friendship. Again, here, if the three persons are close friends, it follows again that the Old Testament and the New Testament must not be

[1] Cf. Tertullian, *Marc IV* 22,2, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCSL) 1, Brepols, 1954, 600.

[2] "*[Q]uid tam Christi Creatoris quam secum ostendere praedicatores suos?*" (Tertullian, *Marc IV* 22,3, 1, *op. cit.*, 601).

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seen as conflicting (as Marcion would understand it), but rather as complementary to each other.

Moving a scene further, regarding the Voice which spoke about His Son, Tertullian adds after "this is my Son" the words "whom I have promised anew" (*quem repromisi*).[3] The phrase "whom I have promised anew" was placed by Tertullian in the Father's mouth, so to speak, in order to make a Biblical "throwback," thereby mentioning again a link between the Old Testament (have promised) and the New Testament (anew).

Before we mention what the promising again (*repromissio*) is about, we can already mention here, regarding the Christ, Moses and Elijah being together, that Tertullian's point is that the Christ does not make the Old Testament irrelevant, much less antagonistic to the New Testament. Rather, there is a transfer (*decessio*) and succession (*successio*) from the Old Testament (the Law and the Prophets, represented by Moses and Elijah) to the New (represented by the Christ). Again, the hermeneutics of continuity (to paraphrase Joseph Ratzinger) instead of Marcion's hermeneutics of discontinuity. Moreover, this transfer and succession is not something out of the blue, since in Tertullian's mind, the Creator God of the Old Testament is the same Father of the Christ mentioned in the New Testament.

Now, about the *repromissio* implied in the words "whom I have promised anew." It is the Voice of the Father speaking. This audiophany makes a throwback to the time when Moses was still alive on earth, he had requested the Lord to show him His glory (cf Ex 33:18), which he was denied, lest he die. Now, that unfulfilled wish would come true in Christ's Transfiguration. This also states that if that wish was granted by the Lord by making Moses present with Elijah beside the Christ, then it means that the Christ and the Lord of the Old Testament are one and the same. Later on, Christian theology would say that the Father and the Son are consubstantial (*homoousios*), one essence (*mia ousia*) divine.

[3] Tertullian, *Marc IV* 22,9, *op. cit.*, 602.

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The above is just a sample of what aspects of the Transfiguration narrative were helpful to Tertullian in his attempt to answer some aspects of Marcion's teaching. I think it is remarkable that even though we find ourselves in the very first babbling of the early Church grappling for terms and loving the Bible very much, despite not yet having chapter and verse numbers in the Scripture back then, and even though Tertullian had his own personal struggles, which led him to Montanism, an event such as the Transfiguration of Jesus would be able to be a firm introduction to faith seeking understanding (as what St. Anselm would much later formulate), faith seeking words, in the face of a formidable opponent such as dualism and Gnosticism. Early on, a New Testament pericope was used in order to refute heterodox teachings.

Two terms that had come to light in Tertullian's refutation of Marcion's Scriptural ditheism are *contubernium* and *repromissio*, the former as friendship or a special type of camaradierie originally in the military context but re-contextualized or inculturated by Tertullian into the context of Jesus, Moses and Elijah; the latter as a term to designate two separate but related events in Moses' life – his unfulfilled wish of seeing the Lord, a wish fulfilled in his apparition with Jesus Christ in His Transfiguration.

Connecting the above with an Asian culture, Filipino culture to be exact, for the typical Tagalog-speaking Filipino, Jesus' friendship and reecounter with His friend Moses both are, aside from the primary and practical reason of Tertullian, two sub-arguments which are under the argument of Jesus' Transfiguration, two ideas which underlie a part of the Transfiguration narrative which may pull the heartstrings of a Filipino: love of God as befriending (*contubernium*) His witnesses and the love of God as giving a person a second chance (*repromissio*) at meeting Him. And so, Jesus' Transfiguration may transmit ideas like friendship and promise fulfillment, within the general context of Jesus' Transfiguration, which can thereby be described as an event about God's love shown in friendship and faithfulness, as well a Jesus-centered event. Do these two terms in Latin ring a bell to Tagalog-speaking Filipinos? Maybe not the Latin, but possible Tagalog

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renderings like *pagkakaibigan* (friendship) and *katuparan ng pangako* (fulfillment of a promise, in the sense of the fulfillment of the *palabra de honor,* so ingrained in the Filipino culture). Both are expressions of love: friendship and fulfillment of a promise. *Pagkakaibigan* can even be characterized as a special kind of *pakikipagkapwa*, especially because friends have something in common, something shared together, *may pinagsamahan.* We can say that a reason why Moses and Elijah were with Jesus was that they were united especially in view of God's plan in Jesus' life, a preview to the imminent *exodus* to His Passion. As for the *repromissio*, *pangako* (promise) is a keyword in the lexicon of love for Filipinos. To fulfill a promise indicates a word of honor, *palabra de honor*, observing honor, which is as a hallmark of love as is *pagkakaibigan.* We can even link both words by saying that a special kind of social relationship (*pakikipagkapwa*) is friendship (*pakikipagkaibigan*), related textually to Jesus, Elijah and Moses, and a hallmark of this friendship, and therefore of love, is the fulfillment of the promise (*katuparan ng pangako*), originally said of the Father's fulfillment of Moses' ancient request, by subsequently seeing Him in the Son. Abstracting a bit both *contubernium* and *repromissio* from the original Synoptic contexts, we can say that both are means to show love, both are dimensions of love: social and fulfilling, presentializing, if we may say so. Love, *pag-ibig*, is also a key entry in the Filipino love lexicon. By first mentioning that there may be possible renderings of terms in Patristic writings like *contubernium* and *repromissio* into Tagalog terms like *pagkakaibigan* and *katuparan ng pangako*, and secondly, by linking the latter pair with other key terms in Filipino culture like *pag-ibig* and *kapwa*, and thirdly, by seeing the difference of contexts of the words in question in that of the author (polemical, in Tertulian's situation, and not necessarily political from the viewpoint of the Filipino culture I have mentioned above), one can then abstract the terms and try applying them to other contexts, and thereby making it possible to connect them to the Christian faith seeking understanding, by saying that God, in Jesus' Transfiguration, shows us the importance of friendship and fulfillment of a promise, but also shows us that Jesus Christ values friendship and fulfilling a promise, not only in the greater plan of the Paschal Mystery, but are also valuable in the daily Christian life, which is, all of it, a work in

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progress to enflesh *pakikipagkaibigan* and *katuparan ng pangako* which, for a Christian, are not merely academic, anthropological characteristics of a Filipino, but are characteristics of Jesus Christ inculturated in the Philippines, with all its possible connections with Scriptures, liturgy, moral life, prayer, dealings with others.

The above method of relating two terms from Tertulian's reflection on the Transfiguration event, mutatis mutandis the original polemical context aduersus Marcionem, and after having related them to two terms in Filipino culture, can be said of the other pericopes mentioned not only by Marcion, but in fact by other early Christian authors as well. We have just cited aspects of Tertullian's argument against Marcion using the Transfiguration event as a case in point where he was able to contextualize something that happened in the time of Jesus, in order to face something in Tertullian's context. And with the above application of the two terms into Filipino culture and faith, we have tried to suggest connections which han be had with regards to the rest of the Church Fathers and even ecclesiastical authors. For more information about a Transfiguration Theology in the Latin Fathers, see this link to my Dissertation: (LST Monographs number 4 https://lst.edu/articles/lst-launches-its-new-publication-the-loyola-monographs/).

Conclusion: Are the Church Fathers Relevant in a 21st Century Inculturated and Contextualized Asian Theology?

As was stated in the first part of the paper, one possible factor in the dwindling number of those studying and learing about the Church Fathers is a *lack of opportunity to explore the engaging connectivity* between the culture where the Church Fathers were in, and the twenty-first century culture we are in, especially here in (Souheast) Asia.

Of course, the connection of the Church Fathers with culture and inculturation is not at all about merely scouring the Patristic texts for entries with "cultura" and its related words and concepts, however important the latter may be. More importantly, the said connection of

the Church Fathers with culture and inculturation may be seen in *the Patristc text and context*. Is it not to unnecessarily go back to obscurantism and anachronism? On the one hand, it might just sound like that, were the Patristic texts to be read and interpreted as if they were literary ecclesiastical archaeological artifacts, without hinting at any connectivity and perennial commonality and importance of the Church Fathers themselves, their texts, contexts and lives to the third millennium we are in. But on the other hand, if the Patristic texts would be considered not only in their contexts "outside"` of the *personae* of the Church Fathers, but also in the manner the Church Fathers had responded to concrete life-situations during their time, which were not absolutely different from those of our times, if set apart the phenomenon of technology and its huge effect on our everyday lives from the nineteenth century onwards for the time being, then can one perceive, glean and value not only the *commonality* of the questions and issues the Church Fathers then and the Catholic Church worldwide now have, but also the *practicality* of learning from the Church Fathers. Patristics, as any branch of history–which in Patristics enrichingly crosses back and forth often among ancient history, history of the Church in antiquity, theology and philosophy–is not only about the past, but about the present, since Tradition is essentially *traditio*, what is bequeathed and inherited from the forefathers, and ultimately, from Christ Jesus and the Apostles, to benefit the Church for all time, and is about the future, for the challenges, perennial or otherwise, which await us Christians in this twenty-first century.

Indeed, there is still a long way to go before a conviction of the perennial relevance of the Church Fathers systematically takes flesh in a pan-Asian inculturated and contextualized Theology. There are no ready roads to tread on. But at least, a conviction might just providentially, *Deo volente*, start a small steady spark on studies of the Fathers of mostly west Asia from the first eight centuries who could, so to speak, be made to dialogue with south, southeast and east Asia, in the twenty-first century. Yes, Patristics can still be relevant in the twenty-first century, and can be connect with other cultures and theologies like Filipino theologies.

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