GROWING INTO *KUSANG-LOOB* AND *KA-KRISTONG LOOB*: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF EXPLORING *LOOB* AS THE FILIPINO'S UNDERSTANDING OF CONSCIENCE IN TODAY'S TIMES

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Why *Loob*: Addressing Current Filipino Moral Worldview Problems

In the Philippines, there are about 80-90% Catholics. It is the only country in Asia that has such an overwhelming majority of its population under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff. A gift from medieval Spanish conquerors, which was forcibly planted and nourished for three centuries, one may expect that Catholicism in the Philippines is progressively mature in terms of faith and moral practice. In closer introspection, however, there hovers a historical clout of *split-level* morality among most Filipino Catholics. Exteriorly, *Simbang Gabi* or the December novena masses celebrated in all parts of the country are brimming with Catholic warm bodies, Church Sunday Masses that are celebrated in more than eight timeslots appear to be insufficient for the attending flock, multitudes of devotees and a variety of devotions like the *Black Nazarene* or *Our Lady of Penafrancia* or *Our Lady of Pillar* sprout like mushrooms in the nooks and crannies of the republic, and bishops and priests are revered despite their human limitations and mistakes.

Yet the country ranks high in the corruption index of nations around the world, gossiping and backbiting are widespread and almost cultural, numerous cases of philandering are culturally

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considered as signs of a "true" man, and entrenched deeply almost as habit is the election of erring and even convicted officials back to government positions. The prevailing notion of justice is closer to a conception of *mercy*: Filipinos tend to let the mistakes of others pass, forgetting the crucial element of justice needed to repair the damage inflicted by certain immoral acts. This is clearly seen in how political families, who have been convicted of plunder and other high crimes, are still being elected to positions of higher responsibilities in government without the benefit of a served sentence or jail term. These antithetical cultural realities cast long shadows over the transforming power of religious exterior activities and devotions that are eagerly and generously participated by Filipino Catholics. Fr. Dionisio Miranda SVD, a noted moral theologian writes similar observations:

> Although true of other societies as well, there has always been a perceived divide between what Filipino Catholics believe and how they behave and live...This is not to deny many positive elements. Everyday young boys can play pick-up games of basketball without a referee. Passengers pay their *jeepney* fares absent of any conductor...A significant number of church people strive to incarnate the love God has for his people...On the other hand one cannot deny its negative traits as well...Our politics reek of patronage, and because of cronyism and nepotism, we remain high on the list of countries shunned for graft and corruption...Human rights violations have been reduced only in its most formal technicalities. Visitors are appalled by the incidents of kidnapping and con games against tourists...How can all of this be explained? In the past this phenomenon is labeled as split-level morality or a gap between our ethos and ethics. But there is also a split between our ethos and our faith, or lack of integration between faith and morality...[1]

[1]Fr. Dionisio Miranda SVD, "Filipino Catholics and Christian Moral Life," *Diwa: Studies in Philosophy and Theology* 28, 1 (May 2003): 2.

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The reality of split-level morality among Filipinos gives a concrete glimpse of the imperfect Filipino moral worldview that moves any observer to reflect and speculate on the possible causes of (and, further, on solutions to address) the gap between ethos and faith. Part of the key to understanding the Filipino moral worldview and its possible correction in light of Christian morality is found in its historical-cultural appropriation of the gift of the Christian faith. A Filipino moral theory is proposed by Fr. Miranda. He describes:

> Filipino morality is grounded in a sense of this *pagpapakatao*, an understanding of oneself as a free moral subject and responsible moral agent, where human acting is moral if *makatao* or humane, and immoral, if not...it is becoming more and more human not in isolation but through relating; morality is responsibility to the other without whom one cannot be...In more technical terms, Filipino morality is more character-oriented rather than ontological, not grounded on any metaphysical moral order but aiming at a moral balance or harmony of human relationships...In traditional theological language, the Filipino conscience responds to virtue summons more than it does to imposed duties deriving from norms, it discerns more through values rather than through principles. This bent explains in part why we are more prone to moralism rather than legalism, for example, or why we emphasize relationships over activism, or why we respond more to persuasion than to authoritarianism, or why we are impressed with moral character than moral achievement...This personalist bent explains why the ethical profile of the Filipino is defined primarily through the concept of "*loob*" or interiority.[2]

Fr. Miranda highlights some crucial elements of Filipino moral theory. In particular, he refers to the concept of *loob* as the primary *definitor* of the Filipino moral worldview. This paper will explore what *loob* is and its implications in

[2]Ibid., 3-4.

understanding the phenomenon of split-level morality among Filipinos of faith.

The paper aims to explain the Filipino's understanding of conscience through its cultural equivalent in the concept of *loob*. It will employ some linguistic and historical approaches. Thoughts of Leonard Mercado, SVD, Dionisio Miranda, SVD, and Albert Alejo, SJ will form part of this paper's primary sources. They will be complemented by sources from the Western theological notion of conscience as discussed by Richard Gula, SS, with some notes from Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). The paper then will surface some important implications of these theological reflections on *loob* in terms of correction, formation, and language of conscience that are much felt when confronted with several current moral and social issues. It concludes with a set of recommendations on how the Filipino's concept of *loob* could be aligned more with Christian morality.

Exploring *Loob*: A Linguistic and Historical Survey

What is *loob*? How does a Filipino Catholic make sense of a given situation and eventually, enact moral decisions through *loob*? Fr. Miranda provides fascinating levels of meaning of *loob* in his introduction. He muses:

> Essentially *loob* refers to a local or spatial interior, or to that which is not open to the naked eye. It carries with it the notion of invisibility, whether partial or total... eventually, however, *loob* primarily refers to a symbolic interior and more particularly human interiority. *Loob*, thus, refers primarily to a core or a center, and the first question that suggests itself is, what is this human core we call *loob*? In the second place, whether in the spatial human sense, we note degrees of interiority: the inmost and the deepest part is characterized as *kaloob-looban, pinakaloob, kaibuturan*...To anticipate, *loob* as a synthetic concept is the individual's unique interiority; as an

> analytical concept, it is the unrepeatable complex of an individual's awareness and thought, his emotions and sense of value, his personality and character...[3]

Fr. Miranda describes *loob* as the totality of a person's interiority. This interiority has an invisible spatial dimension. It is composed of different elements: feelings, values, character, soul, and awareness, among others. Fr. Leonardo Mercado, SVD, offers similar descriptions of *loob*. He reflects:

> ...Conscience is usually presented as if it were a compartmentalized section of man. But this is not so for the Filipino because conscience for him is the same as *buot/loob/nakem*, a word which has no one English translation. *Loob* can be taken in the intellectual, volitional, emotional, or ethical sense of man. "The Filipino looks at himself as a self, as one who feels, as one who wills, as one who thinks, as one who acts; as a total whole—as a 'person,' conscious of his freedom, proud of his human dignity, and sensitive to the violation of the two."[4]

From these descriptions, one could view *loob* as a holistic concept which refers to the inner ethical world of a person. Though located interiorly, when moved and obeyed, *loob* stakes the whole person in its action. Furthermore, the interaction of important elements of moral decision-making happens in *loob*. Some of these elements are emotions, values, suspicions, gut feel, and thoughts. They act as ingredients of moral decision-making located within and they help create layers of meaning and philological uses in one's *loob*. Moreover, another essential part of the description is the choice the person will make. This includes how the person will actualize the choice in

[3]Fr. Dionisio Miranda, SVD, *Loob: The Filipino Within, A Preliminary Investigation Into a Pre-theological and Moral Anthropology* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 1988), 1-3.

[4]Fr. Leonardo Mercado, SVD, *Elements of Filipino Ethics* (Tacloban: Divine Word University Publications, 1979), 39-40.

concrete moral situations. This moral choice is the product of all these individual elements and most importantly, an evident manifestation of a person's *loob*.

Choices are enacted in the outside world; thus, pertinent to the understanding of *loob* is its relationship with the cultural notion of *labas* (outside). Fr. Albert Alejo, SJ, summarizes this relationship when he mentioned that *loob* has something to do with a person's interiority while *labas* is strongly related to action. Thus, a person does not remain within himself but progresses from the inside to the outside through his chosen action.[5] This refers to a cultural conception of morality on two counts: (1) the movement from what is within (*loob*) to without (*labas*) and (2) the impact of experiences found from without (*labas*) influencing (even challenging and measuring the quality) within (*loob*). Though this relational flow of outside-inside is universal, what gives *loob* a more particular shade is the Filipino notion of *kapwa*. *Kapwa* refers to a fellow human being. Fr. Miranda explains,

> Contrary to the perception reinforced by the prominence of *loob*, Filipino ethics is not crassly relativist; the moral agent's empirical reality as *tao* and the necessary reference to *kapwa* also as *tao* impose objectivity inescapably upon moral action and thought. Although not referred to **as** a cosmic order, the actual and real relationships entered into by moral actors are themselves a context which in turn is a measure of objectivity...[6]

The cultural notion of *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (fellowship with human beings) largely defines the Filipino view of the common good: *harmonious relationships*. At the foundation of any moral

[5]Fr. Albert Alejo, SJ, *Tao po! Tuloy! Isang Landas sa Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao* (Quezon City: Office of Research and Publications, Ateneo de Manila University) 1990, 21.

[6]Miranda, SVD, "Filipino Catholics and Christian Moral Life," 6.

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decision of *loob* is its effort to maintain harmonious relationships. *Loob*, though personal and internal, is much swayed by social forces. It is oriented towards the social world. Fr. Mercado argues,

> ...Since the Filipino is *sakop*-oriented, good is more social than individualistic. For example, before a Filipino dresses in the latest fashion (an example of a 'good'), he first sees to it that it is socially acceptable to others. In other words, his idea of good also concerns harmony with the *sakop*.[7]

Fr. Mercado uses the Filipino concept of *sakop* to indicate the boundaries of *labas*. *Sakop*, he reflects, has interpersonal and hierarchical aspects. Interpersonal *sakop* includes families, friends, relatives, and political parties among others; hierarchy is related much to degrees of authority based on succession (with the eldest or the oldest eliciting much obedience and respect from the younger siblings, for example). *Sakop* emphasizes relationships and ranks. *Sakop* prevails over the individual, erecting *pakikipagkapwa-tao* as the main Filipino virtue.[8] As a result, a common moral evaluation of a person's *loob* is through an assessment of his/her harmonious relationships within its *sakop*. Here, *loob* is not a static concept because its quest for peace and harmony is dependent on the person's state of harmonious relationships within his *sakop*.

An employment of a historical approach would help complement the foregoing linguistic approach in our exploration of *loob*. In particular, a historical survey shows different elements of loob that are very important in its evaluation: (1) the emphasis on the use of the faculties of reason and judgment, (2) the principle of rectitude, and (3) the idea of *collective conscience*. These elements provide us with a clear picture of

[7]Mercado, SVD, *Elements of Filipino Ethics*, 40-41.

[8]Ibid., 48-49.

the relationship between *loob* and (a) the use of reason, (b) **a** sense of straight and right path, and (c) the psyche of communal conscience. Fr. Miranda notes:

> A key concept among the Katipuneros was *katuwiran*; this can be seen in the view that the *landas* (way) from *dilim* (darkness) to *liwanag* (light) is *tuwid* (straight); if in accord with *katuwiran* (right reason)... There was a further nuance to conscience. *Loob* can be *mabuti* or *masama*, which refers at once to being in darkness or the light, as well as to being on the straight and right path or the crooked or wrong path...Jacinto's concept of morality plays an important role in reason. In the *Kartilla* of the *Katipunan***,** he defined freedom as equality brought about by the development of *katuwiran*. *Katuwiran* impels the human person to love and help humankind and to hate and fight tyranny. Hence, like Rizal, Jacinto emphasized the necessity to educate the people for the full development of their intellectual and moral faculties.[9]

On the notion of collective conscience, Fr. Miranda continues:

> *Loob* as the Katipunan understands it, was not only the inner self of the Katipunero as an individual; it was also the inner self of the masses in general...Bonifacio saw in the people's expressed desires a common conscience and hence an echo of God's will and command. Thus**,** his Decalogue or *Katungkulang Gagawin ng mga Anak ng Bayan*" ends with the statement that the aims of the *Katipunan* were God-given and that the desires of the country were the desires of God...Mabini shared that view. For him, the common conscience of the people is the voice of God.[10]

Fr. Alejo, SJ, along the same lines, asserts that the prominent understanding of *loob* of most members of the *Katipunan*

[9]Fr. Dionisio Miranda SVD, "The Filipino Conscience: Some Historical Indices," *Diwa: Studies in Philosophy and Theology* 23, 1 (May 1998):10-11.

[10]Ibid., 11.

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is a movement of radical change or transformation within all those who belong to a society.[11] From this, we derive some layers of the meaning of *loob* as an interiority where the sense of right and wrong are found and obeyed, where the faculty of reason is an important function in moral decision-making that should be developed to lead man to love humankind, and that radical changes within a person's *loob* could lead to an ethical transformation of society.

What is *loob*? First, *loob* is a holistic concept referring to the person's total interiority that can influence, through the enactment of moral decisions, his relationship to his *sakop* (world), whose chief element is his *kapwa* (fellow human being). Second, among its faculties, *loob* has to rely on *katuwiran* (reason and judgment) to incarnate the inner yet universal sense of a straight and right path (rectitude), which is none other than the love for humankind. This love for humankind is culturally expressed in the harmony of one's relationships, chiefly with fellow human beings (*pakikipagkapwa*), casting personalistic and humanist shades on the concept of *loob*. Last, *loob* and *labas* or *sakop* are intimately connected; radical changes from within can influence or even transform the situation without while the conditions from without greatly influences the moral choices within. From this, we could have a glimpse of the conception of sin and evil in Filipino moral worldview.

The idea of maintaining harmonious relationships gives reason to the Filipino value of hospitality. This brand of hospitality makes strangers or others (*Iba*) part of *sakop*. This defines the type of fellowship the virtue of *pakikipagkapwa* promotes. *Pakikipagkapwa* treats others as part of one's family. The locus of the common good lies in relationships. Sin or evil, therefore,

[11]Alejo, SJ, *Tao po! Tuloy! Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao*, 24.

is significantly understood in the language of a relationship. Fr. Miranda's reflections show notions of sin as a shortcoming (*pagkukulang*), mistake (*pagkakamali*), and irrational betrayal of humanity (*sira*).[12] Sin is more personal and interpersonal than societal and universal in scope and understanding. There is a strong demand for sensitivity in relationships more than the reliance on reason and judgment in the assessment of what is good or evil. Thus, the culture of shame (*hiya*) is strong; to a large extent, it defines justice. Evil is the opposite of what is human or *kapwa*. For instance, criminals are called *masasamang-loob* (persons possessing an evil interiority) because their acts damage and even destroy relationships. It also counts as a sin to be insensitive or unmindful of other's situations or to forward oneself without thinking of the impact on the other. Even progressing economically ahead of others is a kind of sin since the person lacks fellowship (*pakikisama*) by separating himself from the rest. For instance, the reality of *crab mentality* among Filipinos occurs when a person who does well in life is "pulled down" (either through gossip or backbiting) like crabs pulling down one another in a basket. There exists a social demand from a person to maintain harmonious relationships as part of his/her end or the highest good. Anything less (or even, contrary) results in sin or evil, experienced and manifested in shame (*hiya*). Here, guts (*kutob*) or feelings (*dama*) are often used instruments in moral decision-making and not so much reason and judgment (*katuwiran*).

This exposition brings into light some areas for the formation and correction of Filipino moral worldview through *loob*. In particular, some theological views of conscience from the West could help refine *loob* and its moral formation towards Christian morality. To this, I turn in the next section.

[12]Miranda SVD, "Filipino Catholics and Christian Moral Life," 8.

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Kusang-Loob and *Ka-Kristong Loob*

The Filipino moral worldview through *loob* could be enhanced through some concepts culled from the Western idea of *conscience*. There are parallel characteristics between *loob* and conscience, and exploiting these matching traits could form part of *inculturated* theological thinking about conscience and *loob*. I begin with the nature of conscience as articulated in *Gaudium et Spes*. It states:

> In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience, when necessary, speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it, he will be judged. (9) Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. (10) In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law is fulfilled by the love of God and neighbor. (11) In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity.[13]

In *Gaudium et Spes*, conscience refers to (1) the most secret core and sanctuary of man (2) where God and man meet and dialogue that (3) summons man to do good and avoid evil, (4) revealing to man God's law that is written in man's heart, a law fulfilled by love of God and neighbor, (5) applied in specific situations. These elements resonate with the main features of

[13]*Gaudium et Spes* 16.

loob: the core of the human person and his interior space, a kind of sanctuary where the person struggles with his *saloobin* (inner world comprised of feelings, thoughts, and guts, among others). However, there is an important question about which good conscience/*loob* is oriented towards to.

For Filipino Catholics, the source of the good is what *Gaudium et Spes* described clearly: God Himself, incarnated in the "law written in human hearts." Yet within *loob*, God faces competition with the good of maintaining harmonious relationships. The main virtue of *pakikipagkapwa* reveals that the good which largely frames Filipino moral worldview is the harmony of relationships. The correction of *loob* lies in content. Richard Gula, SS, in outlining the three dimensions of conscience in his reflection on *Gaudium et Spes*, has the same observation. He describes:

> In light of this holistic sense of conscience, we can appreciate the three dimensions of conscience to which the Roman Catholic tradition ascribes: (1) *synderesis*, the basic tendency or capacity within us to know and do good; (2) *moral science*, the process of discovering the particular good which ought to be done or the evil to be avoided; (3) *conscience*, the specific judgment of the good which "I must do" in this particular situation. To simplify matters, Timothy O'Connell refers to these dimensions as conscience/1, conscience/2, and conscience/3, respectively. These are not three different realities, nor three different stages through which conscience moves in developing from infancy or adulthood, but simply the three senses in which we can understand the one reality of conscience.[14]

In application, the Filipino *loob* contains the three dimensions of conscience. It has the tendency or capacity to know

[14]Richard M. Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 131.

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the good and engages itself to formulate a moral choice to apply what is good in certain moral situations. The tasks of correction and formation of *loob* are spiritual: to root more and more in the Gospel values as proclaimed and lived out by Christ. This is one of the pedagogical roles of religious practices and devotions (both personal and popular). They help a person develop his/her *loob* to accept Christ as its *terra firma,* or the final cause and definitor of what is good. It is to follow Christ, growing in courage (*tibay ng loob*) in choosing God when doing so sometimes demands the sacrifice of some important relationships. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) similarly argues:

> A man of conscience is one who never acquires tolerance, well-being, success, public standing, and approval on the part of prevailing opinion at the expense of truth...Thus two standards become apparent for ascertaining the presence of a real voice of conscience. First, conscience is not identical to personal wishes or tastes. Second, conscience cannot be reduced to social advantage, to group consensus, or the demands of political and social power.[15]

The gap between ethos and faith in Filipino moral worldview might be overcome when a person exhibits *tibay ng loob*. This is accomplished when he/she allows the Gospel values to determine largely his/her moral choices in particular situations. In Filipino culture, *loob* can be easily swayed; there exists a real struggle **to** demonstrate courage (*tibay ng loob*) in making moral stances. In post-modern times, the culture of popular opinion is very much strong. Moral and political protagonists aim at persuasion and influence. Thus, the main struggle for an ordinary Filipino lies in his conviction (*paninindigan*) of his moral choice (*pasiya*). Conviction is determined, nourished,

[15]Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *On Conscience: Two Essays* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 26.

and sustained by the fundamental relationship between God and man found in his/her conscience. Joseph Ratzinger defines this as *anamnesis*. It is the ontological level of conscience that closely resembles *synderesis*. He explains:

> This means that the first so-called ontological level of the phenomenon of conscience consists in the fact that something like an original memory of the good and true (they are identical) has been implanted in us, that there is an inner ontological tendency within man, who is created in the likeness of God, toward the divine. From its origin, man's being resonates with some things and clashes with others...It is so to speak an inner sense, a capacity to recall, so that the one whom it addresses, if he is not turned in on himself, hears its echo from within. He sees: That's it! That is what my nature points to and seeks.[16]

In terms of *moral science*, which Gula identifies as one basic dimension of conscience, the person's *loob* would benefit much from the faculty of *katuwiran* (reason and judgment). *Katuwiran* does not only pertain to the use of the mind or intellect through the analysis of information crucial in moral judgment. The notion of *katuwiran* is largely about the use of intellectual faculties in the right or straight manner which is what its root word, *tuwid*, embodies in meaning (i.e *tuwid* means straight or right). Filipino heroes Emilio Jacinto and Jose Rizal are correct in emphasizing the formation of *loob* through the person's frequent and developed use of *katuwiran*. Yet the rectitude or the *way* is Christ none other; the use and formation of *katuwiran* should be grounded in faith. Similar to conscience, *loob* is formable, growing in deep personal relationship with God through the various moral choices in given situations that in return, deepen the fundamental relationship between Creator and creature, enabling for God and man to root intimately in

[16]Ibid., 32.

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one another. Guts and feelings form part of the data that *katuwiran* will process in order to come up with a moral decision that can even go beyond debt of gratitude (*utang na loob*) in relationships. In this case, *loob* is formed partly through the development of skills and frequent practice of moral decision-making. Joseph Ratzinger agrees,

> ...It [conscience] is an organ because it is something that for us is a given, which belongs to our essence, and not something that has been made outside of us. But because it is an organ, it requires growth, training, and practice.[17]

The tendency to put a premium on maintaining harmonious relationships laid a challenging cultural context for Filipino conscience to grow, train, and practice his/her morality. The penchant for the politics of credibility often reduces morality to an image-conscious and superficial practice of accommodation and popular opinion. The pivot of the culture of shame *(hiya*) must move from relationships to the common good defined by Gospel values. In other words, Filipinos must be ashamed because of the loss of values and virtues due to the chosen evil or unjust acts and systems. It is for Filipinos to demand justice because some choices which privilege the preservation of harmonious relationships have compromised the basic Gospel values.

Is there any cultural Filipino concept that can embody suggested changes for the formation of *loob*? There is the cultural notion of *kusang-loob*. *Kusang-loob*, in Fr. Alejo's ruminations, refers to the (1) one's personal enacted choice, (2) discerned and determined in freedom, (3) interiorly and peaceful made, (4) not just a mere reaction from outside forces or even love of self, and (5) a kind of self-generosity to one's

[17]Ibid., 61.

neighbor that does not wait for anything in return.[18] *Kusang-loob* demands a lot of courage to go against any tide of popular opinion to enact the discerned good. In *kusang-loob*, the person employs largely the faculty of *katuwiran* as its primary motor. It is a display of a person's volition or will (*kusa*) in the environment of freedom (*kalayaan*). It is a proactive kind of *loob* that does not merely "ride the bandwagon" to preserve harmonious relationships (*pakikisama*). It is where a person is willing to invest his/herself (*pagtataya*) in the struggle for the common good (*pakikibaka*).

However, it seems that *kusang-loob* is still incomplete. It is neutral in content in terms of the basic foundation or fundamental orientation which is what conscience of Gula pertains to. In other words, any ethical value or set of virtues could serve as the foundation of a person's moral action. The tendency to know and have the capacity for the good in Christian morality is never neutral but skewed in favor of God, incarnated in Christ. The fundamental laws of love of God and neighbor written in human hearts are actualized in Christ, the model that any Christian conscience must strive to follow and grow in likeness to. *Kusang-loob*, therefore, must mature into *ka-Kristong loob*. Christ is the model *par excellence* of moral action. Only in deep knowledge, relationship, and imitation of Christ will *kusang-loob* truly find its fullness. A good case here is the debates on the Reproductive Health Bill that eventually was passed into law. If we only remain with *kusang-loob*, a person could employ scientific data or secular values as his/her moral motivation to follow and even evaluate the law. *Ka-Kristong loob* is different. It is rooted in Christ and the Gospel values. Here, a person makes a discernment which includes facts, ethical views, and other information pertinent to the law. But this

[18]Alejo, SJ, *Tao Po! Tuloy! Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao*, 139-140.

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discernment is framed by the application and interaction of the Gospel values to the specific moral situation. It is what it will apply given the moral situation, in this case, in following the Reproductive Health Law. Fr. Miranda describes,

> Moral catechesis should become more Christological and Trinitarian: Christ is the *Tao*, the human person par excellence, on whom we base our *pagpapakatao*, who, at the same time is the Son of God who stripped himself of his divinity to show us what true *pakikipagkapwa-tao* implies. Beyond the moral heroes proposed to us by Philippine history, Christ must become more and more the Filipino's "moral law" and moral ideal.[19]

Though a personal task, the employment and formation of conscience requires aid from the Church. The Church should act like a midwife, helping bridge the gap between creature and Creator in given moral instances. Thus, *Ka-Kristong loob* implicates the Church and her role in helping form her faithful's consciences. Joseph Ratzinger exhorts:

> Here we need what Plato was referring to when he said the good cannot be known scholastically, but only after regular familial discussion can the notion of the good spring into the soul like lightning springing from a small spark. This constant "familial discussion" within the Church must build up the community of conscience—those who try to express their word in the teaching office, as well as those who wish to learn that word from within themselves.[20]

Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes how the notion, application, and continued pursuit of the good especially the common good are *both* personal and communal tasks. This avoids the extreme poles of relativism and authoritarianism; the Church, though a mother to her faithful, is the same companion along

[19]Miranda SVD, "Filipino Catholics and Moral Life," 11.

[20]Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *On Conscience: Two Essays*, 64.

the personal journey that helps each faithful incarnate the good in specific moral situations through discerned choices. To grow in *ka-Kristong loob* also demands *kusang-loob*; each faithful must learn to exercise his or her freedom of choice and be given enough room to practice moral discernment. The Church's exercise of moral authority, in this case, appears as a compassionate teacher rather than a police-like Mother.

The "familial discussion" that builds the community of conscience is a process of dialogue that is neither subjective nor rigid, but one in which the faithful prayerfully listens and reflects on available data and various voices of society. Here, fellowship (*pakikipagkapwa*) is viewed differently: a dialogue where one is *hospitable* to all voices in society yet refuses to simply compromise one's discerned position. Furthermore, dialogue employs *katuwiran* that reveals itself as discernment, which has, at its core, the Gospel values sought for and applied to specific moral situations. In cases of controversial laws and policies that might endanger the common good, reasonable dialogue among citizens is essential. It is also a space in which a Filipino Catholic can make a discerned choice which will help form his/her *loob*. The ability to make reasonable and spiritually grounded moral choices is an important moral and practical consideration for the faithful. They have to have opportunities to actualize their faith experiences through moral practice; in particular, to align their *loob* with Christ. This contributes to what Joseph Ratzinger suggests as the "building of community of conscience."

Conclusion: Maturing from *Kusang-Loob* to *Ka-Kristong Loob* and Some Notes for Further Reflection

The foregoing theological reflection on *loob* and conscience contributes to the articulation of the Incarnation. Each

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culture has the seeds of God or the *Logos*; yet, they need aid or purification for them to realize their true nature. It is no different in the case of *loob*. The exploration of *loob* leads to the discovery of similar traits with a *conscience*—the spatial interiority, tendency to do what is good, discernment, and finally, conviction. It also reveals some marked differences, which form opportunities for critical reflection and maturity. In particular, the interior world of *loob* should be grounded in the basic relationship of God and man through Christ, who is the Way. This inner world also considers how *loob* should grow in *katuwiran* not only in its use of reason and judgment, but in using the straight or right way, showing how Christ is also the truth. And how *loob* should have courage in enacting its personal decision in a respectful struggle with fellow human beings, pursuing the common good, manifesting Christ's charity in actualizing God's kingdom on earth. The Filipino's understanding of conscience through the concept of *loob* reveals a synthetic and humanistic moral worldview. In this worldview, the person needs to grow into *kusang-loob* in his/her use of reason and judgment (*katuwiran*), and finally mature into *ka-Kristong loob* in grounding his/her moral choices in the Christian faith.

This *inculturated* task is both personal and communal. The Church's important role is a humble one, different from the authoritarian role of a mother if it wants to remain relevant and intimate with its flock. Plenty of listening and dialogue is required; the Church, especially in the Philippines, where the majority are Catholics, should be a *companion* along the way. Joseph Ratzinger, in addressing the bishops, stresses,

> Setting out from such a personal knowledge of the moral world of the Church, he must attempt to remain in discussion with those experts who seek the correct application of the simple words of faith to the complicated

> reality of a particular time. He must, therefore, be prepared to become a learner and a critical partner of experts...[21]

Some laws and state policies show the polarization of the Church. Instead of engaging in dialogue, people choose to remain in hard and uncompromising positions. It even went to the point of spiritual and political threats, of matters of excommunication, and the emergence of the myth of a "Catholic" vote. If the faithful will not be given enough space to exercise their conscience, how will *loob* grow into *ka-Kristong loob*? How will the Church discover and experience the rich meaning of its role as a midwife if it will not allow Filipino Catholics to struggle in their discernment, exercising *kusang-loob*? To maintain her relevance in these postmodern times, she needs, through her leaders, to be more of a companion than an authority.

Complex moral situations open up all these critical questioning about the roles of the societal forces whilst, calling into mind the need for prayerful and critical reflection. It is time for each faithful to let the communal spiritual activities of devotions and sacramental celebrations affect his/her *loob* towards authentic change or even conversion to Gospel values. The faithful must grow in volition (*kusa*) and not remain blind followers. They should *own* the faith by letting God, through Christ, be incarnated to root and shape moral choices. The faithful are strongly invited to be braver—*tibay ng loob*—especially if moral situations demand sometimes the re-ordering or even sacrifice of important relationships. This does not mean rebellion or the throwing away (*pagsasawalang-bahala*) of relationships. It is allowing the hospitality of *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (fellowship) to evolve into a respectful *pakikibaka* (common struggle).

[21]Ibid., 71.

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The theological reflection is not yet finished; the inculturated task continues to be incomplete. Some notes for further reflection are proper. First, the concept of *loob* involves different levels of interiority. Emotions, gut feel, thoughts, or *saloobin* are part of *loob*. Much clarification has to be done about the particular use of *loob*. In the Filipino context, *loob* can easily be disobeyed or sacrificed, leaving the person to follow with a heavy heart (*mabigat ang loob*). In contrast, conscience**;** must be followed even if it errs. To put it simply, *loob* is a fuzzy concept. The Western theological reflection on conscience, on the other hand, appears to be more precise and systematic compared to a cultural understanding of *loob*. Further**,** nuancing can deepen the thinking brought forth by this paper.

Second, further investigations on the present changing cultural context of Filipino Catholics must be done. Fr. Miranda, Alejo, and Mercado, though they produce thorough reflections, may seem to be behind on the times. Today, we have been witnessing the phenomenon of Overseas Filipino Workers and its impact on families, especially on child-rearing. Further, the quick expanding access to the Internet has revolutionized the minds of the youth beginning with the plethora of data and information, diffusion of secular as well as varied religious and cultural values, and dialogue with peoples of other cultures. A good section to explore is the Filipino youth's notion of *loob* today. Another important factor is the media. Cases of high crimes and important law legislation processes are televised; the transcripts are easily accessible online. Information and protagonists behind current vital issues are within reach. Though this is favorable in Filipino's development and use of *katuwiran*, it is interesting to validate the intensity of influence of popular opinion and relationships to the *masa* or Filipino crowd. At what point or level of *katuwiran* can the *masa* or Filipino masses be located? What kind of *loob* is predominant?

And how far (or near) are they in *Ka-Kristong loob*? Amidst all these notes for further reflection, it is hard to deny the relevance of the Incarnation in moral decision-making. God is found in the particulars of a culture; Christ is a companion along the inconspicuous roads of moral practice. It holds the key to helping Filipinos close the "gap between ethos and faith" to have and live out a more intellectually mature and spiritually sound morality.