# LOYOLA PAPERS

## STUDENT AND ALUMNI JOURNAL OF LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 3 | Number 1 | 2022 | ISSN 2719-1834

### ARTICLES

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*Edrylle C. Dayrit*

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**Experiencing, Living and Celebrating our Christian Story**
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### CONTRIBUTORS

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OF LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 3 | Number 1 | 2022 | ISSN 2719-1834

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Ateneo de Manila University
Quezon City, Philippines

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*Loyola Papers*, The Student and Alumni Journal of Loyola School of Theology, is published twice a year by Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City, Philippines. Postal address is: Loyola School of Theology, P.O. Box 240, University of the Philippines, 1144. Editorial matters are the responsibility of the Editor (research@lst.edu). Circulation and business matters should be addressed to Roselyn Taray (finance@lst.edu.com). Subscription Rates: Philippines – Institutional Print PhP 650, Individual Print PhP 550, Single Issue PhP 350. For Other Countries – Institutional Print US$ 60, Individual Print US $ 50; Single Issue, US$ 35.

Aside from articles in the field of systematic, biblical, moral and pastoral theology, canon law and church history, articles on religious education, pastoral psychology and counseling, spirituality and retreat-giving, integral ecology, migration, and philosophy may be submitted to *Loyola Papers* at research@lst.edu. The manuscript, following Turabian style 9th edition, must be between 4,500 and 10,000 words, including footnotes.



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ISSN 2719-1834

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# EDITOR'S PREFACE

As if the double Quincentennial – that of the Arrival of Christianity in our shores and the conversion of the vain soldier, Iñigo de Loyola - was not yet enough for the Ignatian family here in the Philippines, we just celebrated another important milestone in March: the Quadricentennial anniversary of the canonization of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier whom Pope Gregory XV raised to the glory of the altars in 1622 together with Saint Isidore, Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint Philip Neri.

A very interesting aspect is the fact that Pope Gregory XV was himself a product of Jesuit education, having graduated from their German and Roman colleges. And although he studied there a few years after Ignatius' death, he must have developed quite a devotion towards the Founder to not only canonize him – overturning an earlier rejection by Pope Clement VIII - but to even donate a sizeable fortune to build a church in his honor. None of us in LST will probably be able to demonstrate our affection for our patron to such a degree. We will never have the same chance to write his name in the roll of the sainted, but we can simply write, and every quiet, humble act of diligent study will be a contribution, no matter how small, to building up the Church. Ignatius himself lived such a life - seemingly uneventful compared to that of Xavier or many other saints. But behind his desk, he was also planting the seeds of the Kingdom of God. The papers of this volume, the fifth so far of this budding publication, are also efforts in this direction.

**Edrylle Dayrit**'s "Philippine Pastoral Implications of Pope Francis' Vision of Youth Evangelization" gathers five key themes from the Pope's teachings, applies them specifically to youth evangelization, and underlines their pastoral implication: (1) the missionary mode of evangelizing, (2) the agents of youth evangelization, (3) synodality and accompaniment, (4) the culture of encounter, (5) and the joy of the Gospel. Drawing mainly from the seminal document *Evangelii Gaudium* and the Pope's Exhortation to and on the Youth, *Christus Vivit*, he offers a practical synthesis of the Pontiff's vision of evangelization - which is not necessarily limited to youth ministry - and identifies its essential features that aim to bring out in evangelizers the magnetic joy of living the Good News that draws and attracts others. As he says, "following Christ's footsteps is not always a journey to Golgotha," but a way through the Cross to the Resurrection.

Next, we have **Fr. Nguyen Huy Quyen, SVD**'s "Doing Contextual Theology: Standing Meditation as an Instrument for Missionary Evangelization in Today's Vietnam." In his analysis of what has become a distinctly Vietnamese Lenten popular devotion first introduced by the French Jesuit, Fr. Alexandre de Rhodes, in the 17$^{th}$ century, he highlights the important qualities of "standing meditation" and its great potential in evangelizing the people of Vietnam. Here, what seems initially as a very external or even theatrical activity emerges as a concrete way of internalizing faith and empowering believers to imitate Christ's self-giving love, as told in this very colorful and compelling narration of his Passion and Death, similar to but distinct from our own Filipino tradition of the *Pabasa* or *Pasyon*. Moreover, he underscores the contribution of "standing meditation," both actual and prospective, in doing the three forms of dialogue enjoined by

the FABC: dialogue with people (especially the poor and the marginalized), dialogue with people of other cultures, and dialogue with people of other religions.

We also have **Maria Socorro Bacani**'s "Using Imagination in Teaching Christian Doctrine in Religious Education" which proposes engaging the power of human imagination and harnessing its possibilities for religious education. Building upon the ideas of Newman, Schneiders, and Lynch, she views the use of imagination as a way to address three major problems in relation to what the National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines identifies to be a weakness among many religious educators: the presentation of doctrines only "as a factual information, or as abstract, impersonal propositions that have to be memorized as head knowledge, but with little or no practical relevance to daily life" (248). Going beyond mere intellectual comprehension and reflection, she recommends tapping on the learners' imagination to make the truths of faith come alive and become more inspiring, empowering and transforming. Finally, she offers three fundamental principles by which imagination can be used in teaching the faith as a way of leading students to rediscover its life-changing beauty.

Meanwhile, **Fr. Kurt Zion Pala, MSSC**'s "Canon 915: The Spirit and Letter of the Law" dares to explore this complex and contentious canon on the denial of admittance to holy communion to those who "have been excommunicated or interdicted after the imposition or declaration of the penalty and others obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin." With a wide-range of applications from divorced and civilly remarried couples to politicians who publicly endorse legislations or promote policies contrary to Church doctrine, his thorough analysis manages to bring out the truly pastoral motive of this canon beyond its penal implication.

We also have **Fr. Azam Mansha, CJM**'s chaste but captivating biblical exposition of "Johannine Mariology in John 2: 1-11 and Jn 19: 25-27." Taking the account of the Wedding at Cana and juxtaposing it with the words addressed by Jesus from the Cross to his mother and the beloved disciple, he presents the figure of Mary in the Fourth Gospel as the preeminent representative of God's faithful people, the first believer and disciple of Jesus, and the chosen Mother of his community of disciples.

Lastly, we have "Repent and Believe in the Gospel: *Lex Orandi* and *Lex Credendi* in the Ash Wednesday Liturgy" by **Anthony John Javier, SSP** where he explores the rites and prayers used in the imposition of ashes and ponders their meaning as a reminder of our mortality and a call to return to God each year as we begin the holy season of Lent. By invoking the axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi,* he reminds us that good and authentic liturgy is not only spiritually nourishing but also intellectually enriching and morally transforming.

* * *

We are pleased to feature three synthesis papers in this volume of *Loyola Papers*. First, we have **Fr. Cesare Sposetti, SJ**'s "Divine Flesh: The Interplay Between Human and Divine in the Double Movement of Deification of Humanity and Humanization of Divinity." Picking up an odd if not irreverent question from an Italian novel that goes "How and why should this fat and flabby body resurrect?," he in turn asks, "how God could really love our human flesh, or, more widely put, our very humanity." This question, right at the very heart of the Christian faith and often at the center of many a theological controversy, serves as the linchpin of his theological precis centered on the Incarnation and the admirable exchange between divinity and humanity powered by grace.

Next, we have **Rev. Eugene Parayaoan**'s timely opus "500 Years of Catholic Faith in the Philippines: Today and Onward" where he reflects on the current state of Christianity in the Philippines in light of the ongoing Quincentennial celebration. Far from offering a triumphalistic paean, he leads the reader in humble reflection with his insightful and thought-provoking observations that will hopefully help our local Church as we continue to grow from being merely "religious people" to becoming a true "people of faith."

Last but not the least, we have **Rev. Paul Richard Dy**'s "Experiencing, Living and Celebrating our Christian Story." Coming from his own personal experience of conversion from being a "self-confessed agnostic" to one who sees his life "as a grand narrative woven together by intricate patterns of meaning and redemption." He then presents the basic doctrines of faith with the history of salvation as framework. His treatise fittingly culminates in the Church, where God's saving work is celebrated and continued in the sacraments, allowing us to see our story in His, and His in ours.

* * *

Our celebrations this year also lead us to look back at the life of Ignatius to see his story in God's story where injury opens the way to healing and brokenness becomes the path to wholeness. We give thanks to God as we marvel in awe at the inscrutable workings of his grace, which led the injured soldier of Pamplona from being wounded by a cannonball to being inscribed into the canon of the saints and blessed. We in *Loyola Papers* and Loyola School of Theology proudly bear the name of this pilgrim as we also strive to follow in his limping footsteps, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

*Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo*

# ARTICLES

# Philippine Pastoral Implications of Pope Francis' Vision of Youth Evangelization

*Edrylle C. Dayrit*

## Introduction

On January 18, 2015, a vast crowd greeted Pope Francis on the grounds of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila, where he met with different religious leaders and led a liturgical celebration at the UST Sports Field for his encounter with the youth.

With fatherly affection, Francis said to the youth present:

> It is a joy for me to be with you this morning. I greet each of you from the heart, and I thank all those who made this meeting possible. During my visit to the Philippines, *I wanted in a particular way to meet with young people, to listen to you and to talk with you.* I want to express the love and the hopes of the Church for you. And I want to encourage you, as Christian citizens of this country, to offer yourselves passionately and honestly to the great work of renewing your society and helping to build a better world. In a special way, I thank the young people who have offered words of welcome to me.[1]

Pope Francis listened to four representatives of the Filipino youth who shared their testimonies and raised questions in the

1 Pope Francis, *Message with Young People: Address of his Holiness Pope Francis.* Vatican Archive, January 18, 2015, accessed July 7, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150118_srilanka-filippine-incontro-giovani.html.

meeting. In the afternoon, during a mass attended by around six million people in Manila's Rizal Park, Francis called on Filipinos to be "outstanding missionaries of the faith in Asia."[2] In his homily, he described the Philippines as "the foremost Catholic country in Asia," saying "this is itself a special gift of God, a blessing," and a "vocation."[3]

Pope Francis believes that as a country which is predominantly Catholic, the Philippines has much to offer in view of evangelization, especially to the youth. On the day the Filipino Church celebrates the "Santo Niño," Francis urged Filipinos to look to the Christ Child, the protector of the Philippines, as their model and reminded them of the importance of protecting the family. He said that Filipinos need to see each child as a gift to be welcomed, cherished, and protected. He concluded that young people need *pastoral care* so they will not be "robbed of hope and condemned to life on the streets."[4]

This article aims to make a thematic presentation of Pope Francis' vision of evangelization and youth evangelization as presented in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) and *Christus Vivit* (CV). Five key themes will be explored in this chapter: (1) the missionary mode of evangelizing, (2) the agents of youth evangelization, (3) synodality and accompaniment, (4) the culture of encounter, (5) and the joy of the Gospel. In each theme, the author gives a brief summary of the key points of Francis' vision of evangelization and youth evangelization. Then, a short synthesis from the two salient points is given. Lastly, an illustration of pastoral implications in the Philippine context is drawn. In conclusion, the author emphasizes that a

2 Scjphil, "Pope's Message to the Youth and Filipino Catholics," *Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Blog,* January 18, 2015, https://scjphil.org/2015/01/18/message-for-the-youth-and-filipinocatholics/ (accessed July 7, 2021).

3 Scjphil, "Pope's Message to the Youth and Filipino Catholics."

4 Ibid.

missionary and synodal Church, a ministry of presence and encounter, and being sensitive to the signs of the times are important elements of youth evangelization.

## Integration of Key Evangelization Themes of Pope Francis and Youth Evangelization in *Christus Vivit*

### Missionary Mode

#### Vision of Evangelization

In Pope Francis' vision, he says that the Church is primarily and fundamentally missionary. He dreams that the entire Church would constantly be in a missionary mode—always ready to go out, extend herself to others and preach the Gospel message of Christ, rather than always in a conservation mode (cf. EG 27). Like previous popes, he teaches that the Church does not only have a mission. *The Church is missionary by her very nature.* The moment "mission" is removed from the Church, it ceases to exist. Thus, missionary outreach must be the paradigm for all the Church's activity (cf. EG 15). Furthermore, he advocates that the "ecclesial introversion" mindset must be removed and prefers a Church that is bruised, hurting, and dirty because of going out on the streets (cf. EG 49). A missionary Church is one that goes out from her own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel. Hence, he envisions the Church as a missionary Church and sees the role of his pontificate as bringing about the transformation of the Church into a missionary Church. His mission is one that ushers in transformation.

In other words, the missionary mode is one of the salient themes in the pontificate of Pope Francis, as it is evident in

his vision of evangelization. He desires that the Church should go out and continue the journey onto the streets. He wants to promote a new missionary thrust that goes hand in hand with the social dimension of evangelization and overcomes the inward-looking focus of earlier Church theology. He wants the Church not to be self-referential but always going forward to continue in its journey, take the initiative to seek others who have fallen away, and stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.

## Youth Evangelization

In *Christus Vivit,* Pope Francis highlights the context of young people today (cf. CV 86-110). During the 2018 Synod on Youth, most of them raised that many are taken by ideologies, marginalized and socially excluded, influenced by the digital environment, youth migrants, or have experienced violence and abuses. Francis says that the reality where the youth find themselves today is heavily influenced by different aspects of society. Given these situations, there is a need for them to be evangelized.

Concomitantly, youth evangelization for Pope Francis should be primarily missionary. The Church should go out and proclaim the Gospel to the youth. In order to respond to the dreams of young people, the Church must be open, welcoming, and not self-referential. According to the Catholic News Service, "many young people want to know and understand the teachings of the Church."[5] They want to be evangelized. Despite what many people may think, they long for silent reflection and active involvement to serve their communities.

5 Catholic News Service, *"Christus Vivit: Church, World Need the Gifts, Enthusiasm of the Young,"* St. Louis Review, April 2, 2019, https://www.archstl.org/christus-vivitchurch-world-need-the-gifts-enthusiasm-of-young-people-3842 (accessed May 17, 2021).

In the same manner, Francis encourages the youth to take risks, be present and get involved. He asks the youth to have an encounter with the Church.

## Synthesis of Evangelization

Part of the Church's **mission is to evangelize the youth**. In CV, Pope Francis emphasizes the reality of the youth today. Given their context, the youth need help, assistance, and pastoral care from the Church. All these realities point out the Church's need to be missionary in her stance. This would only be possible if the Church shifts from self-conserving to a missionary mode of youth evangelizing. The Church cannot just remain enclosed within herself. She must always be ready, as on a mission, to evangelize the youth today.

Secondly, the **entire Church is missionary.** Everyone is involved in this missionary work of youth evangelization and not just the ordained ministers: "Although it is never easy to approach young people, two things have become increasingly evident: the realization that the entire community has to be involved in evangelizing them and the urgent requirement that young people take on a greater role in pastoral outreach" (CV 202). The laity are also involved in this missionary outreach. In the same manner, youth evangelization does not end with the youth being evangelized. After being graced with the gifts of evangelization, they are also called to evangelize others as well. They, in turn, will be missionaries patterned after the missionary Jesus. They are also sent on a mission: "If we hear what the Spirit is saying to us, we have to realize that youth ministry is always missionary" (CV 240). This point will be further elaborated in the next theme.

## Pastoral Implications

In 2019, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) dedicated the entire year as the **"Year of the Youth"**—part of its "nine-year journey for the new evangelization." This year-long celebration reflected on the theme "Filipino Youth in Mission: Beloved, Gifted and Empowered." Activities on the national and diocesan levels were aimed at various objectives: youth in formation, youth in community, Church and society, youth in mission, and youth ministry and ministers.

The third goal of the 2019 Year of the Youth was "Youth in Mission." The goal aimed to foster "youth who are constantly inspired by the Church's missionary spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary, who courageously shares Christ's message of joy and hope to people in difficult situations, rekindles the faith of those who drifted from the Church, and promotes dialogue with other faiths."[6] The 2019 Year of the Youth invited the Church into a prayerful discernment about young people's importance and life-giving presence in the local Church and society. It called for dialogue and active engagement focused on the reconnection and renewal of a new generation of young people in the life of the Church. The Church is sent as on a mission.

A recent survey conducted by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) says that 80% of Filipino youth suffer some form of physical and psychological abuse.[7] Now, the youth are

6 CBCP News, *"An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines,"* CBCP News, May 31, 2018, https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/an-open-letter-of-the-filipino-youth-to-the-catholic-church-in-thephilippines/ (accessed June 22, 2021).

7 MSC Mission Office Philippines, *"Beloved, Gifted, Empowered: The Year of the Youth in the Philippines,"* MSC Mission, July 4, 2019, https://www.mscmissions.ie/news-media/beloved-gifted-empowered-year-youth-philippines/ (accessed June 25, 2021).

facing problems such as poverty, inability to attend school, thoughts of suicide, emotional distress, mental disorder, distorted values, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and the like. These data show that many young people are deeply wounded and broken. In this regard, the Church has an important role and mission in the youth's psychological, emotional, and spiritual healing and well-being.

To give a particular diocesan viewpoint, the fifth pillar of the Diocese of Cubao Priority Agenda for 2019-2027 is "engaging with the youth."[8] According to the Diocese of Cubao Commission on Youth:

> The Filipino youth today faces different issues such as increasing suicide rate, premarital sex, illegal drugs, depression, identity crisis, and family problems that greatly affect their emotional, social, spiritual, physical and moral well-being. These situations hinder their involvement and active participation in the life-mission and work of the Church. Therefore, it is vital for young people to be properly informed and formed about the Catholic faith and Christian values and empower them to be Christ-centered servant leaders and active proponents of change.[9]

Thus, by the end of 2025, the Diocese of Cubao aims to be a local Church where the youth are Christ-centered servant leaders and active proponents of change. This will happen

> through the empowerment of young people by giving intensive leadership training and formation programs that focus on virtue, learning, spirit, and service towards self-transformation; formulation

8 Christ the King Parish, *"2-Page Primer: Diocese of Cubao Priority Agenda 2019-2027,"* CTK Parish, May 2019, https://christthekingparish.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/DCPA-diocese-8-pt-priority-agenda.pdf (accessed July 3, 2021).

9 Christ the King Parish, *"2-Page Primer: Diocese of Cubao Priority Agenda 2019-2027."*

> of programs and activities that engage the youth in the life-mission and work of the Church that will help them become proponents of change; and establishing relationships and collaboration with other ministries that provide opportunities for growth and development of the young.[10]

Hence, the Church and the young people of the Philippines are in mission: proclaiming the Good News who is Christ, especially to their fellow youth in the peripheries.[11] The Filipino youth are beloved by God and his Church, especially through her youth ministry, who raise them up and carries them lovingly through life, with all its trials and tribulations. They are gifted with the Holy Spirit, who inflames them with faith, passion, and courage. Rooted in Christ, they are empowered to shine on a world of darkness and confusion, taking part in His Body, the Church, for building God's Kingdom.

## Agents of Youth Evangelization

### Vision of Evangelization

In EG, two crucial elements as regards the agents of youth evangelization are emphasized: the agents themselves and the understanding of the renewed emphasis on the missionary nature of the "entire" Church (cf. EG 120). The agents of evangelization are all people. This means everyone not only the clergy, but also the laity. Also, in EG, Pope Francis specifically mentions that primarily, the transcendent agent of evangelization is the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, in this work of evangelization, he says that the Blessed Virgin Mary,

10 Christ the King Parish, *"2-Page Primer: Diocese of Cubao Priority Agenda 2019-2027."*

11 Christ the King Parish, *"2019 is Philippine Catholic Church's Year of the Youth,"* CTK Parish, December 31, 2019, https://christthekingparish.ph/2018/12/31/2019-is-philippinecatholic-churchs-year-of-the-youth/ (accessed July 3, 2021).

the entire people of God, universal Church, diocese, parish, Church institutions, homilists, youth, and the poor, are all vital agents of evangelization (cf. EG 111-134).

Consequently, Pope Francis also emphasizes that anyone who is simply animated by the Holy Spirit can be an evangelizer. They can be ordinary and simple people who manifest a life of faith. Even children, according to him, can evangelize other people because they are also part of the Church. Every Christian is a bearer of God's Word wherever one may find oneself.

Finally, any person can evangelize insofar as he or she can initiate an interpersonal encounter. A real encounter is always between two human beings in all their richness and depth of meaning. To evangelize other people holistically, the agent must initiate an encounter. This is only possible when both parties are open to one another. Evangelization is possible for as long as there is an interpersonal relationship.

Thus, all baptized persons are agents of evangelization. Every Christian is called to engage with one another in the task of evangelization. Everyone is a missionary disciple.[12] As affirmed by EG, "all the members of the People of God are missionary disciples" (EG 120).

## Youth Evangelization

In CV, Pope Francis says that youth evangelization is not just for Catholic youth alone. Instead, it is a universal call for all the youth regardless of religious affiliations. Youth ministry must be like a home for everyone, capable of being inclusive and providing room for all kinds of young people

12 James H. Kroeger, M.M., G*o, Teach, Make Disciples: Sourcebook for Mission Education and Animation* (Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines Episcopal Commission on Mission, 2020), 24.

because the Church is a home with open doors. Youth evangelization is for all. In this line, the pope advocates for a "popular" rather than an "elitist" youth ministry—one that is inclusive even of youth that might not yet accept some aspects of Catholic teaching. Francis states that it is enough to have an open mind to all those who desire and are willing to be encountered by God's revealed truth.

## Synthesis of Evangelization

First, since evangelization is a task of everyone, **youth evangelization is a vocation for all**. Youth evangelization is a task of the Church, the People of God. It is not reserved to the ordained ministers alone, but the entire People of God must be involved. It is a responsibility for all Church members and disciples. Every member of the Church shares in this mission and exists for its service, for anyone who has truly experienced God's love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love, especially to the young people. Evangelizing the youth is embedded in the Christian faith and mission.

Secondly, the **youth are also evangelizers**. In CV, Francis sees that young people are "street preachers" (*callejeros de la fe*), joyfully bringing Jesus to every street, every town square, and every corner of the world. He believes that the young bring about fresh and immense hope because the young represent new directions, ways of thinking, and different approaches to the present realities. They offer the Church new ways and means to make her relevant and responsive to the signs of the times lest the community cling to an emotional nostalgia for structures and customs that are long dead and passé.

Finally, as evangelizers themselves, the **youth's characteristics are essential in evangelization**. The special characteristics of the youth can, in turn, be used to evangelize other

people as well. Pope Francis describes the youth as hopeful, in an age of choices, gifted, enthusiastic, connected to Christ, unique, joyful, courageous, and committed. As concluded by Pope Francis, the goal of youth evangelization does not end with the youth being evangelized only. After being evangelized, the youth are also called to be evangelizers and missionaries as well, bringing with them all their gifts, talents, and characteristics that they can share with other people.

## Pastoral Implications

One of the four themes of the 2019 Year of the Youth is the "Youth Ministry and Youth Ministers." The Filipino youth have stated that they aim "to have a preferential ministry for the young animated by youth ministers, who are filled with the spirit of the new evangelization and equipped with pastoral skills and resources, ably responding to youth issues."[13] In the Philippines, the loci of youth evangelization are more commonly at home, in school, and the religious community. The agents of Filipino youth evangelization can be parents, school teachers, elders, and their fellow youth themselves. The family is the basic unit of society; thus, evangelization primarily begins at home.

According to the 2002 nationwide survey among Filipino Catholic youth, the respondents manifest their positive appreciation of family values and strong attachment to family members, particularly their parents, in spite of the general impression that they prefer to stay with their peers rather than with their families.[14] Filipino Catholic youth are always linked

13 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines."

14 National Filipino Catholic Youth Survey 2002. Quoted in Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and Catholic Education, *National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines* (Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 2007), 76.

to their families and their growth in faith. The Philippines is a country that places great value and importance on the family, and indeed, the family is significant in the value and faith formation of their children. Kissing of hand, saying *po* and *opo*, respect for elderly, are only a few of the Filipino traits and virtues that are preserved and traditionally handed on by the family. Basic prayers, names and lives of the saints, and Catholic feasts are often introduced by Filipino parents. There can be no doubt that the Filipino family plays a pivotal role in the life of the individual, society, and their faith formation.[15]

Vatican II stresses that "the family is, in a sense, a school for human enrichment" (GS 52). Significantly, even the youth today still refer to a family member as the first agent who introduced them to the faith.[16] This underscores the indispensable role of parents in educating their children in the faith. Therefore, parents are valuable evangelizers and formators of the faith because, in the family, God is made visible and credible through parents' words of love and acts of charity toward their children.

Secondly, the Filipino youth express that they value their education with their teachers and formators who teach them much of what they know, since they spend most of their time in school.[17] Sadly, some parents have passed the responsibility of educating and forming their children in faith and virtues to the school because of different reasons such as economic realities and single-parenting. Some simply feel that they are incapable of keeping up with their responsibility as formators of faith. Too often, the catechesis of the young is considered

15 CBCP Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and Catholic Education, *National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines* (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 2007), 63. Abbreviated as: NCDP.

16 NCDP, 77.

17 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines."

only in the context of religious instruction.[18] Thus, the author noticed that while some took advantage of the Catholic heritage being offered to students by the institution, many also drifted away from their faith. The campus ministers in the school also share the same sentiments. In their facilitating of recollections and retreats, they realized that there is really a need to follow up with the students about how the sessions and input affected their lives after a series of spiritual-growth activities. The goal is to assess if there is now a growth in their relationship with God and their perspective about life and dealings with others. Thus, there is a vital need for the schools to invest more in Christian Living classes, increase spiritual awareness through quality recollections and retreats, and initiate spiritual-growth activities that allow young people to deepen their faith. After the family, the schools are vital arenas for evangelization.

Lastly, the Church or religious community is the most common place where the youth evangelizers are to be present. Through the Church and her pastoral activities, the youth find a place for encountering Jesus and deepening their faith. The religious community is where the youth feel a sense of belongingness with their fellow youth, hone and share their gifts, talents, and creativities for the Church, and encounter Jesus, the ultimate evangelizer. Angelica Mananes, a parish youth leader in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Bantug, Nueva Ecija, shares her insights:

> Pope Francis said, "Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven—the place that every young person is looking for." The Church is unlike other people who might love us at first, but if they notice something they don't like, they can easily leave

18 NCDP, 77.

> us. God's love for us has no limit—He loves us wholeheartedly. Let us not waste our talents, the gifts that God has given us; let us not be afraid to dream of great things because the Church believes that young people in mission are beloved, gifted, and empowered.[19]

Indeed, the Church has a great role in youth evangelization. The CBCP Commission on Youth said in a statement: "In this journey, we tell the story of the Filipino youth with our Risen Lord; we, young Filipinos and Filipinas listen to Jesus, the Youth Minister par excellence and, as we are blessed and gifted during this journey, *we are empowered to witness and share our faith*."[20] All baptized people in the Philippines are called to be agents of youth evangelization.

## Synodality and Accompaniment

### Vision of Evangelization

Pope Francis envisions a decentralized papacy because it could complicate the missionary outreach of the Church. Instead, he advocates the way of "synodality." He explains that what Jesus is asking from the Church today is contained in the word "synod," which means "walking together—laity, religious, clergy, and the bishops." Admittedly, he purports that it looks like an easy concept, but it is difficult to put into practice.

Similarly, accompaniment is one of the major themes in Pope Francis' papacy. Jesus Himself was incarnated into

19 MSC Mission Office Philippines, *"Beloved, Gifted, Empowered: The Year of the Youth in the Philippines,"* MSC Mission, July 4, 2019, https://www.mscmissions.ie/news-media/beloved-gifted-empowered-year-youth-philippines/ (accessed June 25, 2021).

20 CBCP News, *"Church to Observe Year of the Youth,"* CBCP News, November 15, 2018, https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/church-to-observe-year-of-the-youth (accessed July 9, 2021).

vulnerable humanity so that He can walk, journey, and accompany the entire people of God. The work of accompaniment that is given to the Church is classified as spiritual accompaniment, the art of listening and being centered on the Word of God.

Spiritual Accompaniment is an approach that leads other people to God by being available to them and walking with them in their spiritual journey. Many people think that they can find true happiness by living apart from God and so engage in worldly things to seek fulfillment. However, they fail to see that they remain existentially orphaned, helpless, and homeless apart from God. Guiding other people towards a new life in Christ, sharing with them God's Word, and living a life of familiarity with God are means by which an agent can spiritually accompany other people.

The art of listening is another approach in accompaniment that Pope Francis aims to develop for everyone. According to him, listening, which is more than simply hearing other people, is an openness of the heart that makes closeness possible so that a genuine spiritual encounter may occur. In listening, there must be a constant and honest effort to understand others. This listening requires the agents to be present—attending and tending to another as a person.

Finally, Pope Francis mentions that in order to be an evangelizer through accompaniment, it is necessary to be centered on the Word of God. Familiarity with the Sacred Scripture enables a person to draw from the wellspring of God's love and wisdom. Moreover, God's Word itself is the very source of evangelization. The Church cannot evangelize if she does not allow herself to be evangelized first by the Word of God.

## Youth Evangelization

The FD affirms that "synodality" is always done for the sake of mission. The Church needs to gather together, work with one another and listen to each other in order to learn and grow more in harmony. Pope Francis highlighted that youth ministry must be synodal in essence. It should involve journeying and walking together that value the gifts and charisms of each young person. Motivated by the Holy Spirit, youth evangelization must always be inspired and directed by God, who gathers every person to Himself. Through synodality and accompaniment, the Church, together with the youth, can learn from one another and reflect the richness of the Catholic faith.

## Synthesis of Evangelization

Pope Francis has mentioned the theme of accompaniment in evangelization and journeying together with the youth in CV. First, Francis expresses the problems, situations, and contexts of the youth that surfaced from the 2018 Synod on the Youth. Given all these realities, he is telling the Church that **the youth need to be accompanied.** The youth need pastoral care, and hence, synodality is the key in dealing with them. Young people need shepherds who will guide and direct them back into the life of meaning with Christ. They need teachers who walk the talk. They long for role models to emulate. They want leaders who will journey and listen to them and not boss or police every work they do.

Secondly, **youth evangelization must be experiential**. The youth need evangelizers who will help them know Christ and deepen their relationship with him through companionship and experiences, not mere indoctrination through dogmas, doctrines, or rigid Church teachings. Pope Francis

notes that many young people get bored with the Church, lose the fire of their encounter with Christ, and are robbed of the joy of following Him because the approach of the Church in evangelizing is only through formation meetings, lectures, and inputs. Church interventions to the youth should approach them *experientially*. Evangelization through experiences proves helpful in attracting the young to join Church groups. It must consist of events for renewing and deepening the experience of love and personal encounter with Christ with the accompaniment of the evangelizers. Pope Francis suggests that rather than being too concerned with teaching doctrines, awakening and consolidating their experiences of encounter with the Lord would be more holistic and rooted.

Lastly, the Church needs to enter into **dialogue with contemporary youth culture.** According to the 2018 Synod on the Youth, many programs for the young are no longer effective because the approaches used no longer apply to the present generation. The youth today want more involvement and collaboration. They want to be active participants in Church activities and not just passive receivers of the Gospel. To be sensitive to the signs of the times is a great key to enter the world of the youth today. Pope Francis suggests that this can be done through testimonies, songs, active prayer meetings, spiritual reflection on the Scriptures, and even a prudent maximization of social media, where the youth are into these days.

## Pastoral Implications

Lei Lopez, a pastoral counselor of the RMT-Center for Family Ministries in Ateneo de Manila University, recounts her experiences of journeying and accompanying adolescents and young adults (many of whom are seminarians) in the Philippines. She often listens to stories of heartbreak, suicidal

attempts, pressure from parents, sexuality, skepticism, toxic relationships, betrayals, etc. While there is a tendency to immediately judge the youth today using the pretext of the older generation, she notes:

> Yet if we are to be ministering to them, we have to set aside these tendencies and judgments. We start with an honest effort to understand them. There must be a degree of curiosity about what is happening to the teen, adolescent, *millenial*, young adult or youth whom we are ministering to.[21]

The Filipino youth see themselves as beloved, gifted, and empowered.[22] They want to be seen as life-giving, dynamic, overflowing with blessings, willing and open to learn and grow; that they are searching for their identity in terms of meaning and purpose, and that they are called to act, but also need *guidance formation.* Lopez acclaims that in her dealings with the youth, what usually stands out as the one thing that makes the most sense and impacts to them is *when they are noticed and listened to.*[23] In other words, the best approach to accompany and engage with the youth is a ministry of listening. Coming from the perspective of a pastoral counselor, if the ministry of listening is truly practiced, encounters and engagements with the youth will be more effective and meaningful.

Earl Valdez, a priest of the Archdiocese of Manila and one of the participants of the pre-synodal meeting held in Rome in preparation for the XV Synod of Bishops on "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" affirms that

21 Lei Lopez, "A Pastoral Counselor's Reflections on Ministering to the Youth," in *Tinig Loyola,* 21 (2020): 31.

22 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines."

23 *Ibid.*

> Overall, the participants believe that all young people in the world have enough gifts and capacities to contribute to the Church and the world in new and fresh ways. They can accept the mission of evangelizing through listening and accompaniment in their own contexts in the same way that they are guided and led by good Christians in their own lives, ordained and lay alike.[24]

In accompanying the Filipino youth, the evangelizers should first provide the space and opportunities for them to name their situation from their own perspectives and contexts. The Church must be willing to first dialogue on the level of the concerned people themselves, and it is only then that the evangelizers propose and discern ways of moving forward and determining what the Lord desires for the Church and the youth in particular. Deep pastoral listening is the starting point for accompanying young people in their journey of discipleship.

Secondly, considering pastoral implications during the 2019 Year of the Youth, various activities were organized by the youth ministries in parishes, dioceses, and even other religious communities. The activities such as youth camps, vocation jamborees, piety seminars, and others were held. In addition to religious festivities, some workshops such as leadership trainings, seminars on mental health issues, preventing suicides, and issues on sexuality (teenage pregnancy, premarital sex, contraceptives, and relationships) were also conducted.[25] Mainly as a response to the needs of the youth from their open letter to the Philippine Catholic Church, these activities allow the youth to engage and participate experientially in

24 Earl Valdez, "Synodality and the Church," 2019. Unpublished Article.

25 John Christian Baxa, "Evaluation and Reflection on the Year of the Youth in the Philippines," in *Tinig Loyola* 21 (2020): 29.

Church activities. Most of the Filipino youth benefited from these various programs. Indeed, for youth evangelization to be more effective, it must be experiential, guided, and accompanied by various agents of evangelization.

Lastly, in the open letter of the Filipino youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines, they assert that many of them regard themselves as "more spiritual than religious."[26] They acknowledge the presence of God, believe in Him, and yearn for Him; however, many choose to express this longing for a deeper relationship with the Lord and heighten their experience of faith through personal prayer and participation in various prayer gatherings—not through liturgical celebrations. In this context, what the young people need is guidance and accompaniment. If the Church only insists on its doctrines, teachings and pastoral letters, little evangelization can happen. This is because the youth also mentioned their apparent distrust and doubt on the credibility of the Church.[27] Hence, entering into dialogue with their youth culture, meeting them where they are, and listening to them are basic steps for the Catholic Church to understand their emotions, sentiments, and spiritual needs, which will serve as a guide to formulate a pastoral program.

The Filipino youth emphasize:

> Our hearts are open to see and embrace role models who give witness to the goodness of life while rooted in the family. We want our elders to journey with us, to be approachable and not untouchable, to level with us to a certain extent, to walk the talk, and to make us sense that we are all equal. We are persons

26 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines," 4.

27 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines," 4.

> capable of contributing in the way others do—with our own skills, knowledge, and wisdom.[28]

The CBCP said in reply:

> As with the two disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35), Jesus constantly and faithfully accompanies young people in the journey of life. We, as Church in the Philippines, are called to take the same stance with our youth: journeying with them, listening to their doubts and dreams, inviting them to conversion and communion, and raising them up in mission to enlighten and inflame the country with the Spirit of Christ and to tell the world of His love.[29]

This mission of accompanying the Filipino youth does not cease with the end of the 2019 Year of the Youth, but rather, it is a beginning for the Church to journey with the youth towards being beloved, gifted, and empowered. They need teachers and mentors. The youth have much to offer if only they are listened to, initiated through experiences, and experience accompaniment.

## Culture of Encounter

### Vision of Evangelization

As stated in the first theme, Pope Francis strongly believes that the entire Church must be missionary by her very nature. She must always be in missionary disposition to go out and preach the Gospel to all peoples. In doing so, however, Francis also believes that a "Culture of Encounter" must be at the forefront of every mission. For him, it is not only enough to see but look; not only hear but listen; and not just feel pity but

28 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines."

29 Christ the King Parish, *"2019 is Philippine Catholic Church's Year of the Youth."*

be moved with compassion. Simply put, he is asking the evangelizing community to get involved, be present and create a culture of encounter with other people.

In the Scriptures, the covenantal relationship between God and His people is very prominent. Out of love, mercy, and compassion, God remains faithful to the Israelites despite their infidelity. He saves them through the prophets, speaks with them, and works miracles for the people. This relationship is primarily an encounter of love and faithfulness. In the time of Jesus, many accounts record Jesus' encounters with various people. Likewise, he would speak to them, listen to their struggles and walk with them. He is constantly reaching out to everyone and inviting them to an encounter of life.

In this culture of encounter with one another, Pope Francis reiterates the words of Pope Benedict XVI, which says that "the beginning of an encounter with one another is but a product of one's encounter with Christ" (cf. CV 11). Thus, an evangelizer's encounter with God leads to a desire to encounter others. It is the encounter with the mercy of God which commissioned evangelizers as missionary disciples to share the Gospel with those who are outside the experience of God's merciful love.

Pope Francis says that people are already used to the "culture of indifference." In this situation, people usually tend to make comments, express verbal pity over unfortunate things, and then move on. It is a shallow involvement with other people. Nevertheless, according to him, an encounter is different—a person must gaze and not just see; touch and not just stop; speak and not just pass by. In the same manner, evangelization can happen when an authentic human encounter is present among individuals—something that is compassionate, inclusive, and one that weaves a relationship, not division.

## Youth Evangelization

In CV, Pope Francis frequently mentions Jesus' encounters with the youth, the very experience of Jesus as a young person, and Mary as the model for the young. He uses the Sacred Scripture to illustrate how God constantly reaches out to the young people and offers them guidance and direction through an authentic human encounter. These quotations allow the Gospel to speak and serve as a message to the youth to always be open to authentic human relationships and cultivate a culture of encounter.

Moreover, in CV, Pope Francis says that young people leave the Church because an encounter is missing. The youth want to participate and learn more about the Catholic faith not just through catechisms and meetings but through life-experiences and encounters with one another. Pope Francis is encouraging the youth to establish an encounter with the Church.

## Synthesis of Evangelization

First, in order to initiate an encounter with the youth, the evangelizer must first establish an **encounter with God** himself. One must nourish a relationship with God. Having a strong and intimate relationship with Christ is necessary to preach God's Word because to be an evangelizer, one must be first evangelized himself. No one can animatedly be engaged in the Church's mission of making an encounter with the youth without having a connection with Christ through strong faith and prayer life. In order for God's Word to penetrate the hearts of the youth today, the agents of evangelization must be inflamed with the love of Christ, sustained by prayer and spiritual guidance.

Secondly, the Church must be **willing to listen to the youth and enter their world**. The Church can easily evangelize the youth by creating an encounter with them. As Pope Francis puts it, "The Church must listen with an openness of heart which makes closeness possible in order that a genuine spiritual encounter may occur" (EG 171). Such listening entails setting aside biases and judgments about the youth in general. There must be an honest effort to understand and enter their world. For example, the Church must be willing to establish an encounter with the youth by using social media, where the youth are mostly found today. While Francis cautions the Church to always be discerning in engaging in the digital world because of inauthentic encounters, he affirms that the media and the digital world can help people feel closer to one another and create a sense of unity and connectedness with one another. Social media, too, can be a great avenue for evangelization.

Lastly, youth evangelization must be an **experience of encounter**. While lectures, meetings, inputs, and catechisms can be effective channels of Catholic teachings and formations, they may lack the experiential aspect that the youth mostly prefer today. The youth need powerful experiences of God that touch their hearts, leading to an experience of encounter with Him and the growth of authentic community life. They want to be present, involved, and welcomed.

## Pastoral Implications

In the open letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church, they indicated that "Youth in Formation" and "Youth in the Community, Church, and Society" are the first two goals of the 2019 Year of the Youth. They believe that these goals are essential for the greater evangelization of the youth in the Philippines.

As "Youth in Formation," they aim to have an "evangelized youth, conscious of his/her giftedness, transformed by a *personal encounter* with Christ, and growing and maturing through youthful formation and activities."[30] Indeed, the beginning of youth evangelization is a deep and personal encounter with God. Then, it is followed by different Church interventions that allow the young people to grow and be guided. These encounters contribute to building a culture that fosters authentic interpersonal relationships with one another.

Further, according to the open letter:

> We [the youth] long for a Church that embodies Christ's vision and dream for her. It is a Church that has confidence in the young and ensures that they are not marginalized but feel accepted. It is a Church that declares and actualizes her preferential apostolate for them and draws the attention of young people by being rooted in Jesus Christ.[31]

Rooted in a personal encounter with Christ, the youth will yearn for a greater encounter with the Church through various activities and celebrations. The young people need to first feel welcomed and accepted by the Church, before a holistic evangelization can happen through various means of encounter. Consequently, the second goal of the 2019 Year of the Youth hopes for "a family-oriented youth whose image of oneself is patterned after the life of Jesus, who is *actively involved in the life of the Church and society* through their vocation, profession and stage in life."[32] Various Church involvements that cater to the needs of the young people are very important in this work of evangelization, because they

30 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines."

31 *Ibid.*

32 *CBCP News*, "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines," 6.

pave the way for genuine encounters to happen. They need to be involved. They want to participate.

In the same way, the 2019 Year of the Youth was also a time to see and assess the situation of young people so that the Church can become an agent of encounter to them. Young people are vulnerable due to the greater problem of the nation, which is poverty. Because of this, innocent youth are exposed to prostitution, forced labor, violence, abuses, human trafficking, illegal drugs, and other heinous crimes.[33] Many also experience rejection and depression. The Church, especially during the 2019 Year of the Youth, sought to become a beacon to defend the young people who are experiencing violence and abuses and make them aware of God's presence and His desire to encounter them through the Church.

In response to these problems, the youth ministries and other groups in different dioceses and parishes organized some seminars and workshops in order to help the youth who are facing problems and various forms of crisis in their lives. Spiritual counseling was also organized to guide and accompany them in their spiritual life and treasure their faith in God so that it will serve as a solid foundation of the life of young people. Information campaigns through social media accounts, recollections, retreats, celebrations in the diocesan levels, promotions, pilgrimages, formation programs parish-based activities, dialogues, workshops, research, etc.[34] are just some programs and activities of the 2019 Year of the Youth that the young people themselves proposed and initiated.

The CBCP Commission on Youth said in a statement that "the 2019 Year of the Youth is indeed *a journey of*

33 John Christian P. Baxa, SSP, "Evaluation and Reflection on the Year of the Youth in the Philippines," *Tinig Loyola* (June 10, 2019): 29.

34 *CBCP News,* "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines."

*encounter with Jesus*, accompanied by Mary, the Star of the New Evangelization."[35] Above all, the youth should draw inspiration from the life of Jesus, who is ever young. He dedicated his life to mission by bringing God's Kingdom to all the people through countless encounters with them. Truly, 2019 was a fruitful year for the youth of the Philippines because of various programs, activities, and events that established an authentic encounter with God, the Church, the evangelizing community, and fellow youth.

## The Joy of the Gospel

### Vision of Evangelization

Pope Francis describes the joy of the Gospel as delightful and comforting. This is because Jesus Christ Himself is the center of it. Hence, the mission of evangelization must always be filled with life, spirit, and joy. It is never static, negative, or lifeless.

As evident in Pope Francis' writings, joy is central in evangelization. He often speaks of the joy of the Gospel on different occasions and celebrations. Indeed, the reason is that he believes that joy should be one of the driving forces of an evangelizer. The Gospel must be preached joyfully, and joy must be felt by the people to whom the Gospel is preached.

In the very first line of EG, a joyful and spirit-filled missiology is already highlighted (cf. EG 1). Throughout the rest of the document, Francis says that the Church needs to embark on a joyful and jubilant pilgrimage of mission—the proper attitude of all evangelizers. Hence, an evangelizer whose mission is to proclaim the Gospel must radiate the joy that comes from a fruitful encounter with Jesus Himself.

35 *CBCP News,* "Church to Observe Year of the Youth."

Every individual and institution of the Church must shine and scatter the joy of the Gospel to everyone.

Secondly, the missiology of attraction is one of the highlights of Pope Francis' vision of evangelization in view of the joy of the Gospel. He writes that evangelization must work towards attracting people. Thus, the Gospel must be preached joyfully and attractively. Evangelizers cannot help but spread the Gospel of Christ in creative, spirit-filled, and artistic ways.

Lastly, whenever the Gospel is preached, the people receiving it must feel a certain sense of joy. The very source of this joy of the Gospel is one's encounter with Jesus. Joy is present in the recipients because this encounter is not only a simple encounter with other persons—it is, first and foremost, an encounter with a mystery, that is, the sum and substance of joy and happiness. Thus, joy must become the essential companion and content of evangelization because it is an integral aspect of the Christian life.

## Youth Evangelization

Unlike the previous documents and exhortations of Pope Francis that speak of joy as a starting place, this time, he used the title *Christus Vivit* which gives the *reason for the joy* being experienced: "Christ is alive!" In this line, CV is a message of joy and hope. It is a timely message to people, especially to the youth today, who are experiencing despair and weakness in their faith because of different factors in society. He sees the kerygma as a "joyful experience of encounter with the Lord" (CV 214) that must be the foundation and "center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal" (EG 164).

In CV, being a youth is described as a "joy," a song of hope and a blessing (cf. CV 134). Young people today are

characterized by the spirit of joy, exuberance, and jubilation. They are animated members of the Church, and precisely, this is what the Lord desires for them as well: to be happy and joyful (CV 145).

Similarly, this joy of the Gospel that is reflected by the youth today means finding more attractive and appealing ways to come together. As stated by Pope Francis, they know how to organize events, sports, competitions, and ways to evangelize using social media (cf. CV 210). Indeed, they must be approached with the "grammar of love" and the "language of closeness" (cf. CV 211) for evangelization to happen. The young people love attractive and innovative ways more than structured and doctrinal approaches.

## Synthesis of Evangelization

Integrating the foregoing observations, one discovers several pivotal points. First, youth evangelizers must be **"joyful evangelizers."** Young people today must see in the faces of their evangelizers that the Gospel they proclaim makes them really joyful and life-giving. The joy they proclaim must be evident in the way they move, preach and share the Word of God. There is no greater proof to something than seeing the message being proclaimed is evident in the person's life. To share the joy of the Gospel to the youth, this "joyfulness" must be present in all the agents of evangelization.

Secondly, to evangelize the youth, the Church must develop **attractive and appealing ways of evangelization.** The youth love attractive activities in the Church, and hence, it is a big challenge for the evangelizers. Since many young people grow weary of the Church's doctrinal and spiritual formation programs through endless meetings and lecture sessions, other avenues of evangelization should be explored.

Pope Francis suggests that there is joy in arts, music, sports, theatre, etc. These are just some key ways by which the youth today can easily belong and find themselves. Moreover, there are many festive occasions in the Church that can be creative avenues for these active and joyful activities, such as Christmas and Easter seasons. These occasions can help them experience the joy of faith and the "celebration" of the sacraments.

Lastly, the youth must **experience joy in being evangelized** by the Word of God. Although this can be a very subjective and personal one, the joy that comes from Jesus must penetrate the hearts of the youth. More than the feelings of happiness and merriment in Church's activities of evangelization, a more profound sense of joy and fulfillment that is felt in the heart must be evoked. This is none other than the joy of the Gospel itself entering the core of the young people's identity—an affirmation of God's overflowing love and desire to share himself with humanity.

## Pastoral Implications

According to the *National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines* (NCDP), recent youth surveys create headlines picturing a dire catechetical crisis in the youth's poor understanding of the essential doctrines of the faith.[36] Consequently, these surveys underscore the pressing need to radically improve the manner of communicating the essential truths of the faith as truly "salvific truths that save, inspire, uplift,

36 NCDP 78. Cf. Episcopal Commission on Youth, "National Filipino Catholic Youth Survey 2002" which reported that only 58% of the youth respondents (13-39 years old) consider God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that they had little knowledge of, and less motivation about, the teachings of the Church on social justice, premarital sex, marriage and divorce, death penalty, abortion, etc. In another survey, the youth listed religious instruction in the schools among the subjects they least like to study.

guide, offer help and consolation."[37] More than learning the basic tenets of the faith, the youth need to experience the joy of the Gospel once again to understand it better.

The NCDP further observes that "maturing in Christian faith surely involves not only educating the youth in basic Christian teachings but also adopting *a new strategy* for evangelization."[38] The youth need to be approached with fresh and attractive ways. These strategies should bring joy, experience, and attraction to young people.

> This catechetical methodology emphasizes "modes of communication of the Gospel that one might call *epiphanic* rather than argumentative or didactic: not so much clever marketing techniques that make the Gospel appear attractive but rather modes of communication which allow inherent beauty — the *claritas* or radiance, the *consonantia* or harmony, the *integritas* or wholeness — of the Gospel to shine forth, and to attract and draw people's hearts to the acceptance of faith.[39]

In other words, this mode of evangelization can be achieved primarily not only by teaching but by witnessing. As Pope Paul VI asserts: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (EN 41). *In order for the youth to understand the joy of the Gospel, they must first see their evangelizers as joyful as well. In order for the young people to share and spread this joy of the Gospel, they must first feel and experience it in their lives.* This could only

37 NCDP 179.

38 NCDP 79. "Yet, this new and more effective presentation does not mean reducing knowledge of the correct memorized formulae, or evaluating this knowledge in terms of its "popularity" as religious instruction in schools is commonly evaluated" (Ibid).

39 Daniel Huang, "Emerging Global, Postmodern Culture in the Philippines," *Landas* (1999): 58. Quoted in NCDP 79.

happen if their evangelizers are truly formed by a deep love for God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The youth love attractive programs and activities where they feel joy and belongingness. According to PCPII, "such a religious formation is necessary to ground and guide the creative, imaginative, on-going search and experimentation for new methods, new fervor, new expressions, and new means of social communication—for more effective instructing in the 'Good News' especially among the young."[40]

During the 2019 Year of the Youth, various relational activities were organized by youth ministries and other groups in the Philippine context to celebrate it. More than evangelizing the youth through seminars and lectures, the Filipino youth yearn for joyful and attractive activities where they can see joyful evangelizers and discover the abiding sense of happiness that only Jesus can bring in their lives.

## Summary and Conclusion

In summary, Pope Francis' vision of evangelization is mainly characterized by its **missionary mode of evangelizing.** In both EG and CV, he stresses the need for the Church to go out, be open, and not be self-referential (cf. EG 15 and CV 41). To respond to the dreams of young people, the Church must be open and not self-absorbed. To listen, the Church must be welcoming. To evangelize, the Church must go out and reach out to the youth.

The exposition on the **agents of youth evangelization** highlights the universal call to evangelize the youth today. This vocation is not limited to the ordained ministers of the Church, but by the sacrament of Baptism, every Christian is

40 PCP II, 193-201. Quoted in NCDP 79.

called to greater evangelization. Consequently, even the youth themselves are evangelizers of one another.

**Synodality and accompaniment** are key elements in Pope Francis' papacy. In simpler words, they mean walking and journeying together. The Church, with her ministers and laity, gather together to listen to one another and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit working in everyone. Simply put, the faithful gather, dialogue with each other, and discern not only for their own sake but, more importantly, for the world in which the Church is tasked to evangelize. The youth need to be accompanied, encouraged to use their talents and skills creatively, and motivated to take up roles and responsibilities in the Church. They need people who will walk and journey with them.

The theme of the **"Culture of Encounter"** is also emphasized. To evangelize, an encounter is essential and significant. Pope Francis in his "encounter" with the Filipino youth, looked at them, listened to them, and allowed himself to be moved with compassion. He initiated a *culture of encounter*. Francis says: "Every encounter is fruitful. Each encounter returns people and things to their place."[41] The youth today need to be approached with the "grammar of love, not by being preached at" (CV 211).

Finally, the **joy of the Gospel** is underscored as that evangelical joy that must be present in all the disciples of the Lord. Following Christ's footsteps is not always a journey to Golgotha. Instead, evangelizing the youth must be an active and joyful mission, attractive and appealing to them, and creative and artistic in its ways and means.

41 Pope Francis, "For a Culture of Encounter," Vatican Archive, September 13, 2016, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160913_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html (accessed July 9, 2021).

Through the theological and pastoral implications that are explored in this work, this article hopes to encourage and influence readers driven by these three main insights and findings: (1) a missionary and synodal Church, (2) towards a ministry of presence and encounter, and (3) sensitivity to the signs of the times.

**A Missionary and Synodal Church.** Pope Francis advocates a Church that is missionary and synodal. It is a Church that is willing to walk and journey with the people. This Church evangelizes *from below* and takes risks because of its mission. It is a community of believers who is not afraid to go out and preach the Gospel of Christ. Thus, this missionary and synodal Church highlights its *mission to evangelize the youth* through accompaniment and encounter.

**Towards a Ministry of Presence and Encounter**. While this study affirms the idea that *youth evangelization is a vocation for all people in the Church,* the author observes that ministering to the youth must involve a ministry of presence and encounter for everyone. This ministry is a very common feature of Pope Francis' papacy. After seeing through the contexts and realities of the youth today, the Church can conclude that the *youth need to be accompanied*. They need the elders' presence, welcome, and offer of friendship. They need pastoral care and evangelizers who can journey and relate with them. Since every member of the Church shares in this vocation, ministering to the youth necessitates that evangelizers must first be willing to listen and understand them.

**Sensitivity to the Signs of the Times**. Being sensitive to the signs of the times is commonly attributed to Jesus' words in the Gospel (cf. Mt 16:3). It does not tell people how they should act in a particular situation but invites them to make a personal discernment in each particular case. Thus,

to evangelize the youth, the evangelizers must be sensitive to the signs of the times. There must always be the element of discernment in approaching various contexts.

# Doing Contextual Theology:

## Standing Meditation as an Instrument for Missionary Evangelization in Today's Vietnam

*Nguyen Huy Quyen, SVD*

### Introduction

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) defined theology as "fides quaerens intellectum" (faith seeking understanding). This definition eventually became a traditional definition of Christian theology. However, this definition is inadequate when doing theology in our contemporary time.[1] According to Father Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, contemporary theology should be both "fides quaerens intellectum" (faith seeking understanding) and "fides quaerens linguam" (faith seeking expression)."[2] This means that faith must be both intellectual and expressed in missionary activities.[3]

Standing Meditation or "SM" was born and raised in the heart of the Vietnamese people and culture. It has become a significant and profound introduction of the liturgical celebrations of Holy Week, with its content mainly taken from the

1 Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, "Theology Whose Heart Is Mission," *Loyola School of Theology,* http://lst.edu/academics/landas-archives/965-qtheology-whose-heart-is-missionq-address-of-fr-antonio-m-pernia-svd-at-lsts-commencement-exercises-on-may-11-2016 (accessed on June 20, 2016); Dias, *Rooting Faith in Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2005), 180; Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 179; and Budi, "Doing Theology in Asia: In the Service of Life," 131-33.

2 See Pernia, "Theology Whose Heart Is Mission."

3 Pope John Paul II, *RM*, no. 11.

passion episodes of the four Gospels.[4] Throughout the history of the country, especially the Vietnamese Catholic Church, this popular devotion developed as a "spiritual nourishment" of the faithful even though it is seemingly forgotten at times. For this reason, this article will attempt to express SM as a means of evangelization in Vietnam today by describing SM in three dimensions: as an expression of faith-seeking-proclamation, good practices, and prophetic dialogue.

## SM as an Expression of Faith-Seeking-Proclamation

The *Ngắm Mùa Chay,* also known as *ngắm dung* (standing meditation), is a distinctly Vietnamese Lenten Catholic devotion. It was introduced by the Jesuit French missionary, Alexandre de Rhodes, who blended elements of Vietnamese poetry and theatre with the traditional Catholic practice of meditating on the Passion of Christ. Drums and gongs provide rhythmic accompaniment and the incorporation of physical gestures like bowing and kneeling engage the body in prayer. In this way, the people are immersed in a very dynamic and engaging way to the narrative of the Paschal mystery.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* Pope Paul VI explicitly wrote, "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed."[5] Indeed, SM functions as the entry point to the whole life of Jesus. In this manner, the researcher will argue the following three aspects of Jesus' life as his proclamation.

4 SM's content is like the content of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius which is also composed from the four Gospels in 1522-1524 (See George E. Ganss, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* [Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992]). Father Alexandre de Rhodes (Đắc Lộ), a French Jesuit missionary in the seventeenth century, composed standing meditation. It is a product of the incarnation of the Gospel into Vietnamese culture.

5 Pope Paul VI, *EN*, no. 22.

## Standing Meditation as the Gospel Proclamation Through Presence and Witness

Talking about mission as bearing witness by silently living with others, Pope Paul VI explicitly said:

> Proclamation must be made above all else by witness... By bearing such silent witness, these Christians will inevitably arouse a spirit of inquiry in those who see their way of life. Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? Why are they among us? Witness of this kind constitutes in itself a proclamation of the Good News, silent, but strong and effective... The Good News proclaimed by witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life.[6]

Indeed, "Jesus [who was] the first and greatest evangelizer"[7] practiced mission in this way. He bore a strong and effective silent witnessing by sharing in the condition of humanity. He witnessed the Kingdom more in deeds than words. His passion and death were similarly strong and perfect.

Learning from Jesus' experience, the community of disciples proclaimed the Gospel by their own witnessing (Acts 2: 14-47). They sacrificed their lives for their mission by going forth and making disciples of all nations (Mt. 28: 19). The Church of today follows this missionary zeal of Jesus and his disciples. The FABC in particular, spoke of ways of truly being a Church in Asia through the following: as 1) a communion of communities, 2) a participatory Church, 3) a Church that faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord by reaching out to peoples of other faiths and a 4) Church that serves as a prophetic sign.[8] Meanwhile, Roger Schroeder offers a

6 Ibid., nos. 21-22.

7 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 12 and Pope Paul VI, *EN*, no. 7.

8 Ibid., 287-88; and see Phan, *In Our Own Tongues,* 15.

simplified way of witnessing at home, in the neighborhood, at work, and in social situations.[9]

In Vietnam, one of the most prominent evangelizing figures is the Avignonese Jesuit, Alexandre de Rhodes who exemplified both a deep understanding of the Gospel and the Vietnamese culture.[10] His missionary life attracted the Vietnamese, such that the local people asked many questions about him.[11] After de Rhodes and the first missionaries, uncountable Vietnamese became witnesses of faith. More than 300,000 Christians were martyred during the era of persecution. Even now, many would silently proclaim the Good News through their daily witnessing.

One particular way of witnessing to the Gospel is gathering together to practice SM. Indeed, when non-believers look at the Vietnamese Christians practicing SM, they see unity and divinity. They recognize similarities between SM and the Vietnamese classical drama that could lead to attraction and possible participation. Hearing the Word of God, opens the way to transformation in faith. Thus, SM becomes a direct entry point to the Gospel of Jesus.

## Standing Meditation as the Gospel Proclamation Through Public Ministry

The missionary spirituality of Jesus can be seen in Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a

9 Roger P. Schroeder, *What Is the Mission of the Church? A Guide for Catholics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 113-14.

10 Phan*, Mission and Catechesis,* 82.

11 Phan, *In Our Own Tongues,* 160-61.

year acceptable to the Lord." These he fulfilled in his public ministry.

First, Jesus came to liberate people from what hindered them from living the life God wanted them to live. He freed them from their sins (Mk. 2: 1-12; Lk. 7: 36-50; 19: 9), sickness (Lk. 7: 23), the devil (Mk. 3: 22; 16:9; Lk. 8: 2), oppressive interpretation of the Law (Lk. 13: 10-17; Mt. 12: 1-8), fear (Mt. 6: 25-34; 9: 2; 10: 28; Lk. 5: 10; 9: 51; 12: 32), and death (Lk. 7:11-17; 8: 49-56; Jn. 11).[12]

Second, he elevated their dignity by giving them new life in God. He laid down his own life and raised it (Jn. 10: 15).[13] Third, the essence of his proclamation was love. He constantly urged his listeners to love God and love each other with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk. 12: 30-31). He taught them to love and forgive each other as he loved and forgave them (Lk. 6: 27-36; Mt. 18: 23-35; 25: 31-46; Jn. 13: 34; 15: 13). Furthermore, he prayed for their unity to the Father (Jn. 17: 20-23).

Fourth, he came "to give people hope for 'something more.'"[14] He spoke of the Kingdom in parables. He compared the Kingdom with a wedding party (Mt. 22:1-14), a banquet (Mt. 8: 12), a sower (Mt. 13: 24), a mustard seed (Mt. 13: 31), etc. Through his words and deeds, Jesus manifested that "his resurrection from the dead was the beginning of the final fulfillment which he promised."[15]

The Church continues Jesus' earthly ministry. She constantly goes to proclaim the Good News to every corner of the world. Mission is her very nature,[16] and her intention is to

12 Bacani, *Jesus Goes Public*, 33-37.
13 Ibid., 38-39.
14 Ibid., 44.
15 Ibid.
16 *AG,* no. 2.

share in the joys and hopes, griefs, and anguish of the people today.[17] The Second Vatican Council drew "a new awareness that missionary activity is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations."[18]

The strategy of the Second Vatican Council is to place missionary evangelization at the center of the Church's identity and mission. Popes Paul VI and John Paul II re-affirmed and re-described the missionary nature of the Church as holistic and integral in *EN* and *RM*. In *EN,* Paul VI described that a pastoral synthesis of evangelization must be salvation and liberation (*EN*, 9, 27, 30-38), dialogue with non-Christian religions (*EN*, 53, 80), religious liberty (*EN*, 39, 80), secularization (*EN*, 55), ecumenism (*EN*, 54, 76, 77), basic communities (*EN*, 58), diversified ministries (*EN*, 73), popular piety (*EN*, 48), etc. In *RM*, John Paul II said that evangelical activity must be holistic: "Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person..." (*RM*, 11); "evangelical witness... is directed towards integral human development" (*RM*, 42); "action on behalf of integral development and liberation... is most urgently needed" (*RM*, 58).

Similarly, Pope Francis reechoes in *EG* the relevance of missionary evangelization of the Church in our contemporary time. He asserts that we need an "evangelizing Church that comes out of herself," not a Church that is "self-referential" and "lives within herself, of herself, for herself." The Pope also adds, "I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled

17 *GS*, no. 1.

18 Pope John Paul II, *RM*, no. 2.

for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation ."[19]

Meanwhile, SM proclaims the Gospel through public ministry for the following reasons: First, SM is practiced in public places, and every person is invited to participate. Thus, when the faithful gather to practice SM, they become wordless witnesses of faith and love. They can "stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live."[20] for in today's world, people desire and respect authentic witness.[21]

Second, the content of SM is mainly taken from the Gospels. Practicing SM is like performing a drama on the passion and the death of Jesus. It makes the participants recall the sufferings of the Christians during the time of persecution. For the Vietnamese, death is more solemnly celebrated than birthdays and weddings. Consequently, SM becomes a direct proclamation of the Word of God because the participants directly listen to and understand the Gospel in their own tongue and culture. Thus, SM is a direct way of "bringing the Good News" or "telling Jesus' story" in the Vietnamese social-cultural context.[22]

Third, SM is a work of inculturation because it combines both the Scriptural passage and the Vietnamese drama. It is an effort of de Rhodes to insert the Gospel into the Vietnamese culture and insert the Vietnamese culture into the Gospel.

19 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 27.

20 Pope Paul VI, *EN*, no. 21.

21 Ibid., no. 41; Pope John Paul II, RM, nos. 11, 42; and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), *Dialogue and Proclamation* http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html, (accessed on September 3, 2016), 10.

22 Pope Paul VI, EN, nos. 18, 22, 27, 42; Pope John Paul II, RM, nos. 44-51; PCID, *Dialogue and Proclamation,* 10; and Eilers, *For All the Peoples of Asia,* 4: 273-81.

The story of Jesus is narrated in a "new and eloquent expression."[23] This is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission in contemporary times.[24]

Lastly, the integral evangelization and proclamation will necessarily include liturgical life, prayer, and contemplation. No one can be effectively engaged in the Church's mission without a strong faith and prayer life. Evangelization needs holy men and women who are themselves on fire with the love of Jesus Christ.[25] SM makes its participants encounter a profound experience of Christ. It helps people become holy men and women by learning and following Jesus in their daily lives.

## Standing Meditation as the Gospel Proclamation Through Empowering Message

Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom is an empowering message. Indeed, the Word of God enables the reader to see the root causes of human sins and provides a means of rescuing humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is also creative, powerful, and transformative.[26] In his public ministry, Jesus invites the people to believe in the transformative power of the Word. In doing so, he describes the Word of God as a seed that falls on different kinds of soil (Mt. 13: 1-23). Like a seed, the Word of God has life in itself that will germinate and bear fruit if the conditions are right.

Recognizing the power of the Word in her life and mission, the Church constantly urges her children to listen to and live it. As stated in *DV*, the Church is born of and lives by the

23 Pope Francis, *EG*, no.122.
24 Pope Paul VI, *EN*, no. 20; and Pope John Paul II, *RM*, nos. 55-57.
25 Ibid., no. 10.
26 *DV*, no. 3.

Word of God.[27] It sustains the Church throughout her history and permeates every aspect of the Church's life. Its power "can serve the Church as her support and vigor... as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life."[28]

In a similar vein, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis speak of the empowering Word. In *EG*, for instance, the Word of God is described by the present Pontiff as "joy," or more specifically, "the Joy of the Gospel," which "fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus." Its power "is unpredictable" and "surpasses our calculations and ways of thinking."[29] Those who listen to and live the Word of God will be "set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness."[30] Thus, the Word of God must be the primary source in the life and mission of the Church and her various practices, such as spiritual exercises, retreats, devotions, and acts of piety.

Looking back at the history of the Church in Vietnam in the seventeenth century, we will better appreciate why de Rhodes created SM as an instrument of proclamation. As a Jesuit missionary and a disciple of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, de Rhodes was aware of the power of the Word of God in evangelization and catechesis. The more important question is, how did he do it? According to Peter C. Phan, first and foremost of de Rhodes's task was the translation of Christian theological terms, the Bible, and catechism into the local language.[31] For theological terms, de Rhodes tried to find the equivalent expressions of Christian terms in the Vietnamese

27 Ibid., no. 1.
28 Ibid., no. 21.
29 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 22.
30 Ibid., no. 1.
31 Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 160-61.

language[32] and then wrote the *Catechismus* in the Vietnamese language. By looking at its content, one would be able to realize that it is similar to a concise Bible, full of Scripture passages.

Moreover, to make the Word of God simple and more convenient in use, de Rhodes composed SM as a way of helping people understand God's Word. For those who could not attend the Sunday Mass for different reasons, he encouraged them to gather together for prayer and devotions.[33] Actually, de Rhodes did not attempt to translate the Bible into the Vietnamese language. However, he created SM and composed *Catechismus*. Theologically speaking, SM is seen as a direct empowering message of the evangelical proclamation of the Gospel, which preserves and nourishes the faith of the people in Vietnam.

As mentioned, the Word of God carries a message of liberation and transformation. It brings people to mission and salvation. When Jesus began his public ministry, he went into the synagogue and read the Word of God. It became the divine power to encourage him to set out for his mission (Lk. 4: 14-30). Similarly, SM is the empowering message of proclamation because it expresses the passion and the death of Jesus. It becomes the strongest and most effective message through which Jesus proclaimed God's love to all people. The participants in SM will have enriched courage to live their faith. They never return empty from participating in SM. The history of the Church in Vietnam is a piece of concrete and strong evidence for this idea. She grows in various difficult circumstances of persecution, but her members have a steadfast faith in God because the Word of God sustains them.

32 Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 135-40.

33 Ibid., 98.

### Standing Meditation as a Way of Accepting Faith

John Paul II once said, "A faith that does not become culture is a faith which is not fully accepted, not wholly believed, and not faithfully lived."[34] Here, faith is Jesus himself—the Good News.

Faith means accepting Jesus: "the Word [*Logos*] became flesh and made a dwelling place among us" (Jn. 1: 14).[35] However, accepting faith is a slow and patient journey through which the seed of God's Word gradually infiltrates into the soil of the hearts of people. Theologically, accepting faith is a "double process of inserting the Gospel into a particular culture and inserting this culture into the Gospel."[36]

Along these lines, popular piety is a way for people—especially the poor and simple—to bring "people into contact with God in Jesus Christ."[37] If we carefully observe how SM is practiced, it is like a journey of sowing the Word of God into the hearts of the people. Saint Paul said, "Faith comes from what is heard" (Rom. 10: 17; *EN*, 42). Before accepting God's Word, people have to hear it first and let it gradually permeate in their hearts. Many Vietnamese non-Christians came to believe in God while practicing SM.

SM is considered a treasure of the Vietnamese Church and the soul of the Vietnamese people.[38] As Father Orlando O. Espín said, it is difficult to interpret the life and faith of

34 cf. John Paul II, "Address to the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment," 2 (16 Jan. 1982).

35 *DV*, no. 2.

36 Pope John Paul II, *RM*, no. 52; and see Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Obis Books, 2004), 213-14.

37 Ibid.

38 Pope Benedict XVI, "Opening Address of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops" (13 May 2007), 1.

real Christian people because they "*sense* that something is true or not vis-à-vis the Gospel, or that someone is acting in accordance with the Christian Gospel, or not, or that something important for Christianity is not being heard." He calls it "faith-full" intuition, "the *sensus fidelium* [sense of the faithful] or *sensus fidei*."[39] This *sensus fidelium* is found in popular devotions, or popular piety, for "faith is understood as fundamentally a way of living or being," "rather than fundamentally a way of thinking."[40]

Through SM, the Gospel has been inculturated into the language and culture of the Vietnamese people. It is fully accepted in the fertile soil of Vietnam. Thus, SM is truly a way of accepting Christian faith in Vietnam, for it is "the expression of a purely human search for the divine."[41]

## Standing Meditation as a Way of Internalizing Faith

When de Rhodes arrived in Vietnam to sow the seeds of the Gospel, his priority was to find appropriate ways to help the local people listen to and understand God's Word in their own language and culture. So, he composed daily prayers, SM and *Cathechismus,* and encouraged the local people to practice them daily. They often gathered together for popular prayers and devotions.[42] SM attracts Vietnamese people because it is performed like a traditional Vietnamese drama.[43]

39 Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 65-66.

40 Ibid., xxi.

41 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 125.

42 Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 98-99.

43 CDWDS, *DPPL*, no. 92.

This drama is a work of inculturation because it is a dialogue between the Christian faith and the local culture.[44]

In order to understand SM as a way of helping the Vietnamese faithful grow deeply in faith, we need to take a glimpse of de Rhodes's *Cathechismus*. De Rhodes paid attention to the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In SM, he recounted the stories of Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, his betrayal by Judas, the Last Supper, his arrest, trials before Caiaphas and Pilate, his flagellation and crowing with thorns, crucifixion, death and burial. He encouraged the faithful to love the crucified Jesus by practicing these stories in SM.[45] The Vietnamese people fell in love while practicing SM because they hear and understand the Word of God through the declaimer's tone and enjoy traditional music and performance. Moreover, they feel that Jesus is in solidarity with them.[46]

According to Peter C. Phan, although de Rhodes mainly took the details of Jesus' passion and death from the Gospels, he did "not merely replicate [them] but put a personal stamp upon [them]"[47] by highlighting various portentous events which took place during Jesus' passion and death. In addition, de Rhodes seemed to understand the importance of death in the Vietnamese culture deeply,[48] so he urged the people to contemplate on showing tender love and compassion.[49] Through the death of Jesus, de Rhodes wanted to sow a hope of eternal life in the minds and hearts of the Vietnamese.

44 Thomas Bamat and Jean-Paul Wiest, eds., *Popular Catholicism in a World Church: Seven Case Studies in Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Obis Books, 199), 111.

45 Ibid., 283-98.

46 Mercado, *Christ in the Philippines*, 55.

47 Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 192.

48 Phan, *Vietnamese – American Catholics*, 61.

49 Ibid., 93-95; and see CDWDS, *DPPL*, no. 80.

Phan concludes that though de Rhodes did not know "inculturation" or "offer any theory of culture," he inculturated the Gospel into the Vietnamese culture through his missionary works.[50]

Thus, looking at the way SM is practiced, the seed of the Gospel grew in the hearts of the Vietnamese people. It is a way of internalizing faith and solidifying one's relationship with Jesus.[51]

## Standing Meditation as a Way of Living Faith

Faith must translate into action. Saint James said, "So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead... Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works" (Jam. 2: 17-18). This means expressing faith in one's daily activities.

In the Scriptures, several figures have demonstrated putting their faith into action. In OT, for example, Abraham, who is called "the father of faith," manifests his faith by setting out for a new land (Gn. 12: 1-3), believing his aged wife Sara will give birth to a son (Gn. 21), and is willing to sacrifice Isaac his only son (Gn. 22). Moses, another man of great faith, listens to God's call: "Go, I send you" (Exo. 3: 17) and responds by leading Israel towards the promised land (Exo. 3: 17). While in the wilderness, he places his people under the protection of God. Similarly, in the NT, Jesus' earthly life is a journey of faith. His death on the cross is the strongest and the greatest action of steadfast faith: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23: 46), and "it is finished" (Jn. 19: 30). Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also a perfect example: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it" (Lk. 11: 28).

50 Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 192.

51 Galilea, *The Challenge of Popular Religiosity*, 49.

The Church is inspired to do missionary activities, liturgical celebrations, arts, and popular piety from these faith models.[52]

From here onwards, SM can be seen as a way of living Christian faith in Vietnam. First, living Christian faith means opening oneself up to the mysteries of the Gospel. Undoubtedly, SM helps people understand the mysteries of the Gospel because it brings them closer to the mystery of the passion and the death of Jesus.[53] The solemn atmosphere of the community, the chanting tone of the declaimer, the melancholic sound of the classical music, the platform's decoration, and how an individual meditation is practiced make the participants enter into and be in solidarity with the suffering Jesus. Participants feel that Jesus is not far from them but near.[54] This is similar to the Filipinos' devotion to the Black Nazarene of Quiapo. They open up to the mystery of Jesus Christ when they participate in the procession. They feel that by touching the sacred image, they would be transformed. [55]

Second, living Christian faith means having a good prayer life.[56] The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS) defines popular piety as "those diverse cultic expressions of a private or community nature which, in the context of the Christian faith, are inspired predominantly not by the Sacred Liturgy but by forms deriving from a particular nation or people or from their culture, etc."[57] SM is a beautiful prayer of a particular

52 International Theological Commission (ITC), "Faith and Inculturation" (1998), no. 1.

53 Phan, "A Dramatic, 'Standing Meditation,'" 95.

54 Galilea, *The Challenge of Popular Religiosity*, 50.

55 Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD, "Filipino Popular Devotions in the Light of Evangelii Gaudium," *Missio Inter Gentes* 1, no.1 (January 2015): 57.

56 Galilea, *The Challenge of Popular Religiosity*, 49.

57 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, no. 9.

community and culture. Adapting Benedict XVI's regard of popular Catholicism in Latin America, SM is a prayer of the community through which we see the devoted and fervent soul of the Vietnamese people.[58]

Lastly, living the Christian faith means putting faith into missionary activities. The Vatican II Fathers said: "The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary."[59] Through missionary activities, people "in many ways seek God in an attempt to touch him and find him."[60] Similarly, SM attracts people to participate in it. Every person would come to believe in God. Indeed, SM "makes them capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief."[61] As a popular Catholic devotion, SM "is the manifestation of the theology of life."[62]

## SM as an Expression of Faith Seeking Prophetic Dialogue

This section attempts to define prophetic dialogue and SM as an instrument of prophetic dialogue toward missionary evangelization in Vietnam.

### Understanding Prophetic Dialogue

Since dialogue is a familiar theme in many Church documents, papal statements, and theological discussions, a basic understanding of it will be discussed here. In Paul VI's *ES*, "dialogue" appeared in an official Church document for the

58 Pope Benedict XVI, "Opening Address of the Faith General Conference of the Latin America and Caribbean Bishops" (13 May, 2007), 1.

59 Vatican II, *AG*, no. 2.

60 Ibid., no. 3.

61 Pope Paul VI, *EN*, no. 48.

62 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 125.

first time. The Pope offered the entire part three to its understanding. An excerpt from it states:

> Here, then... is the noble origin of this dialogue: in the mind of God Himself. Religion of its very nature is a certain relationship between God and [human beings]. It finds its expression in prayer; and prayer is dialogue. Revelation, too, that supernatural link which God has established with [human beings], can likewise be looked upon as a dialogue. In the Incarnation and in the Gospel, it is God's Word that speaks to us... Indeed, the whole history of [human beings'] salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvelously begins with God and which He prolongs with [human beings] in so many different ways...
>
> This relationship, this dialogue, which God the Father initiated and established with us through Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a very real one, even though it is difficult to express in words. We must examine it closely if we want to understand the relationship which we should establish and foster with the human race.
>
> God himself took the initiative in the dialogue of salvation. "He hath first loved us." We, therefore, must be the first to ask for a dialogue with [human beings], without waiting to be summoned to it by others.[63]

Likewise, in a document entitled, "The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions," the Secretariat for the Non-Christians (later renamed the PCID) devotes a generous reference to dialogue. Here, dialogue is

63 Pope Paul VI, *ES*, nos. 70-72.

understood as "the norm and necessary manner of every form as well as of every aspect of the Christian mission."[64]

In *EG*, Pope Francis describes "dialogue" in a communal sense. He points out "three areas of dialogue" as the whole missionary evangelization of the Church. To express her mission in the deepest and best sense, the Church has to practice: "dialogue with states, dialogue with society-including dialogue with cultures and the sciences-and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church."[65] This expands *NA* and *AG's* narrower definition of dialogue as "interreligious."[66]

Meanwhile, FABC understands it in a broader sense by asserting that "dialogue has to take the shape of what has been called a 'dialogue of life.'"[67] In doing so, the FABC describes three features of dialogue: dialogue with people (especially the poor and the marginalized), dialogue with people of other cultures, and dialogue with people of other religions.[68]

In the light of the Church documents abovestated, the Fifteenth General Chapter Statement of the SVD added the adjective "prophetic" to "dialogue" because "the word 'dialogue' was not sufficient to express the full meaning of mission, especially mission seen as challenging unjust and sinful situations."[69] In addition, "prophetic dialogue" is the "deepest and best understanding of the call" of mission. It

64 The Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions" (1984), 29.

65 Pope Francis, *EG*, nos. 238-58.

66 "Nostra Aetate," no. 2 (hereafter *NA*); and *AG*, nos. 11-12.

67 Rosales and Arévalo, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 15.

68 Ibid., 14-16.

69 Ibid., 27.

devoted three paragraphs to state what prophetic dialogue means:[70]

> Our discussions in the Chapter have confirmed that our understanding of *ad gentes* mission has shifted from an exclusively geographical orientation to one that includes missionary situations. From our constitutions, the work of recent Chapters, as well as the broader context in which our mission is carried out today, we identify four frontier situations where we hear a special call to respond: primary evangelization and re-evangelization, commitment to the poor and marginalized, cross-cultural witness, and inter-religious understanding.
>
> There are several ways of articulating this specific call to mission. We believe that the deepest and best understanding of this call is expressed in the term "Dialogue," or more specifically, "Prophetic Dialogue." Since Vatican II, dialogue with other religions has been promoted widely as one aspect of the Church's mission (*RM*, 5). Our specific commitment to this dialogue is reflected in our constitutions (c. 114) and the Statement of the 1988 General Chapter. However, already in the Vatican II documents, the term "dialogue," in all its richness, is used in a wider meaning to describe our proper attitude toward and relationship with all people. Dialogue is an attitude of "solidarity, respect, and love" (*GS*, 3) that permeates all of our activities. Limited as we are by our personal and cultural viewpoints, none of us has attained the whole truth contained in God and revealed fully in Christ. In dialogue, we search together for this truth.
>
> It is in dialogue that we are able to recognize "the signs of Christ's presence and the working of the

70 SVD Generalate, *In Dialogue with the Word: Documents of the XV General Chapter SVD* (SVD Generalate, Rome: SVD Publications, 2000), nos. 52-55.

> Spirit" (*RM*, 56) in all people, that we are called to acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion, that we witness to God's love by sharing our own convictions boldly and honestly, especially where that love has been obscured by prejudice, violence, and hate. It is clear that we do not dialogue from a neutral position but out of our own faith. Together with our dialogue partners, we hope to hear the voice of the Spirit of God calling us forward, and in this way, our dialogue can be called prophetic. Furthermore, dialogue is not limited to intellectual exchanges. Through the dialogue of life, dialogue of common action for justice and peace, and the dialogue of religious experience, it finds expression in all aspects of our lives.[71]

Thus, "prophetic dialogue" means to play a prophetic role in dialogue as an approach in missionary evangelization. It "is not just a new catch-phrase... but a sacred commitment shaped by the Spirit."[72]

## Standing Meditation and Dialogue with People

Looking at the Scriptures, we realize that the poor have a special place in God's heart. God expresses his concern for them in words and deeds by sharing their condition.[73] In this section, we are going to discuss SM as an approach to doing dialogue with all people, especially the poor in Vietnam.

Indeed, the OT tells us that God always expressed his concern for the poor by hearing their cry. For example, in the book of Exodus, God said: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering.

71 Ibid., nos. 52-55.

72 Pernia, "Prophetic Dialogue and the Formation of 'Persons of Dialogue,'" 27.

73 Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 15.

Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land... Now, go! I am sending you" (Exo. 3: 7-8, 10). In the NT, Jesus read from Isaiah's scroll and claimed that he was a prophet for the poor (Lk. 4:18-19). By becoming poor (2 Cor. 8: 9), [74] his heart had carved "a special place for the poor."[75]

Taking Jesus' footsteps, the Church also asserts her missionary option for the poor. In *LG*, the Council referred to the"The Church of the Poor" as the central theme of Vatican II:

> Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption on poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to [human beings]. Christ Jesus, "though he was by the nature God... emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave" (Phil. 2: 6-7), and "being rich, became poor" (2 Cor. 8: 9) for our sake. Likewise, the Church, although she needs human resources to carry out her mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, and this by her own example, humanity, and self-denial. Christ was sent by the Father "to bring good news to the poor... to heal the contrite of heart" (Lk. 4: 18), "to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk. 19: 10).[76]

The FABC adopted the principle and introduced it during their first meeting in Manila. [77] Being the Church of the poor means witnessing "evangelical simplicity," promoting and defending the rights of the poor and the powerless, and avoiding "entanglement" with the rich and the powerful. Since

74 Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 15.

75 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 197.

76 Vatican II, *LG*, no. 8.

77 Rosales and Arévalo, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 1: 5.

1974, the FABC has consistently promoted "The Church of the Poor" as its missionary orientation in Asia.[78]

Thus, the poor and the marginalized have a special place in God and His Church. However, how does the Church, particularly the Church in Vietnam, practice prophetic dialogue with the poor and the marginalized?

SM is a precious Catholic popular devotion that places an important position in the life of Vietnamese Christians. Using Paul VI's popular piety definition as "thirst for God which only the poor and simple can know,"[79] SM is a medium for seeking thirst for God by the poor and the simple. Thus, it can be used as an instrument of prophetic dialogue for missionary evangelization in Vietnam today.

In fact, in our own observation, the majority of the Vietnamese are poor in both senses: material and spiritual. Concerning material poverty, many people lack food, clean water, clothes, houses, job, health care. Whereas in spiritual poverty, many people lack education, social welfare benefits, knowledge, basic human rights, i.e., freedom of speech and religion. Moreover, most of them have not heard about Jesus and the Gospel.[80] The circumstances in Vietnam are difficult and complex. For example, Vietnam is currently governed by the Communist rulers who forbid and set many rules that hinder the missionaries from going to many areas for their mission activities. Thus, the main task of evangelization in Vietnam is to introduce Jesus to those who have not heard

78 Ibid., 15-16.

79 Pope Paul VI, *EN*, no. 48; and Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 123.

80 The current population, according to the latest statistics of March 31, 2015, was approximately 91,903,961. The percentage of the Catholic population in Vietnam is around 7.18 percent of the total population (See "Vietnamese Population," http://ww.countrymeters.info/en/Vietnam; and https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%C3%B4ng_gi%C3%A1o_t%E1%BA%A1i_Vi%E1%BB%87t_Nam (accessed on November 23, 2016)).

about him.[81] And SM, as argued above, is useful and practical in telling Jesus' story to those people in the unreachable areas.

Fortunately, living in an agricultural culture, like other Asian people, the Vietnamese people are incredibly simple and hospitable. They tend not to argue with their mind but rather with their heart. Also, they "love to... link themselves to their past, to their customs and traditions, and to their cultural and religious roots."[82] Thus, to tell the story of Jesus to those people effectively, a missionary has to start with stories, songs, dance, symbols, and a compassionate heart. The missionary approach is thoroughly expressed in SM.

From an SVD's missionary perspective, the concern for the poor is palpable. When Fr. Antonio M. Pernia addressed the SVD members during the Sixteenth General Chapter, he said: "The two indispensable pillars of our vocation are: to be deeply rooted in the Word of God and to be in solidarity with the poor. Only in solidarity with the poor can we listen to the Word of God as Good News, and only God's Word has the power to transform the world of the poor."[83] Even though he did not directly talk about popular piety, the figure of SM is felt through his words.

In conclusion, doing evangelization requires prophetic dialogue with the Vietnamese people, especially the poor and the marginalized.

81 Tagle, "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"; and Pope John Paul II, *EA*, no. 10.

82 Edgar G. Javier, SVD, *Dialogue: Our Mission Today* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2006), 15.

83 SVD Generalate, *Prophetic Dialogue*, vol. 2 (SVD Generalate, Rome: SVD Publications, 2001), no. 73.

## Standing Meditation and Prophetic Dialogue with People of Other Cultures

Besides doing prophetic dialogue with the poor and the marginalized, practicing prophetic dialogue with people of other cultures is also an urgent concern. In this section, the researcher will argue that SM can be employed as an evangelical instrument of prophetic dialogue with people of other cultures in Vietnam.

Culture is defined as "a plan for living"[84] and "a dynamic reality which a people constantly recreates."[85] Learning from Jesus, the Church is called upon to carry out her prophetic role of dialogue with the people of other cultures. He comes from "the culture of Heaven" to practice dialogue with people in "the human culture" (Phil. 2: 6-11; and Jn 1: 14). For example, through the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4: 4-42), Jesus made an excellent prophetic dialogue with the woman who came from a different culture. At the end of the dialogue, Jesus fulfilled her thirst for "living water." Furthermore, Jesus did not discuss culture with her but empathized with her condition. He respected her by patiently listening to her story. He expressed his deep solidarity and love. Moreover, he let his words gradually penetrate her mind and her heart. In doing so, Jesus adapted himself to the culture of the woman. Because of that, she recognized him as "a prophet" and then "a Messiah."

From the very beginning of the Christian mission, the Church was aware of the importance of dialogue with people of other cultures. She tried to look for an appropriate approach to incarnate the Gospel into the specific cultures of the

84 Donald S. McGavra, "The Nature of Culture," in *The Church and Culture: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* ed. Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 160.

85 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 122.

people it evangelized. This required of the evangelizers with regard to the local cultures as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman. For instance, in 1659, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (founded in 1622) instructed the vicars apostolic of Tokin and Cochinchina (Bishops Francis Pallu and Lambert de la Motte):

> Do not attempt in any way, and do not on any pretext persuade these people to change their rites, habits, and customs unless they are openly opposed to religion and good morals. For what could be more absurd than bring France, Spain, Italy, or any other European country to China? It is not your country but the faith you must bring, that faith which does not reject or belittle the rites or customs of any nation as long as these rites are not evil, but rather desires that they be preserved and fostered in their integrity. It is, as it were, written in the nature of all [human beings] that the customs of their country and especially their country itself should be esteemed, loved and respected above anything else in the world... Never make comparisons between the customs of these people and those of Europe; on the contrary show your anxiety to become used to them. Admire and praise whatever merits praise. As regards what is not praiseworthy, while it must not be extolled as what is done by flatterers, you will be prudent enough not to pass judgment on it, or in any case, not to condemn it rashly and exaggeratedly. As for what is evil, it should be dismissed by a nod of the head or by silence rather than by words, without losing the occasions when souls have become disposed to receive the truth, to uproot it imperceptibly.[86]

De Rhodes seemed to follow these instructions in Vietnam prior to the instruction. For instance, he adapted his personal

86 Joseph Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1982), 309-10.

lifestyle to the local people's customs, habits, and rites. He translated Christian theological terms into the Vietnamese language by writing *Cathechismus*, SM, and daily prayers.[87] In addition, he formed lay leaders and catechists—both men and women—as nuclei of the Christian communities. He trusted them. They played the role of the leaders by leading the communities in prayers and devotions whenever the priests were absent. They could share with the missionaries in pastoral ministry. Significantly, many Christian women assumed various important positions. This never happened before in a patriarchal society.[88] Furthermore, he promoted to have native clergies and established a hierarchy in Vietnam. On September 29, 1659, his effort paid off when Pope Alexander VII established two apostolic vicariates with two bishops: Francois Pallu (1626-1684) and Pierre Lambert de la Motte (1624-1679).[89] Thus, we can see how de Rhodes did a prophetic dialogue with the Vietnamese culture at that time.

Similarly, Popes Paul VI and John Paul II also affirmed the importance of doing prophetic dialogue with people of other cultures. In *EN*, Paul VI said: "Evangelization is to be achieved, not from without as though by adding some decoration or applying a coat of color, but in-depth, going to the very center and roots of life. The Gospel must impregnate the culture and the whole way of the life of [human beings]."[90] Meanwhile, John Paul II contributed the following:

> Through inculturation, the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures,

87 Phan, *Mission and Catechesis,* 92-99; and Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 160-64.

88 Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 99-106.

89 Ibid., 66-68.

90 Pope Paul VI, *EN,* no. 20.

> into her community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation, the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is and a more effective instrument of mission.
>
> Thanks to this action within the local churches, the universal Church herself is enriched with a form of expression and values in the various sectors of Christian life such as evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works... Missionaries, who come from other churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their cultural limitations... It is not, of course, a matter of missionaries renouncing their own cultural identity, but of understanding, appreciating, fostering and evangelizing the culture of the environment in which they are working.[91]

For the Church in Asia, John Paul II emphasized both the connection and distinction between evangelization and inculturation:

> Evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture; they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are fundamentally linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures.[92]
>
> As mentioned several times above, the FABC has considered inculturation as the central concern of the churches in Asia. Many of its documents highlight the importance and necessity of doing

91 Pope John Paul II, *RM*, nos. 52-52.

92 Pope John Paul II, *EA*, no. 21.

> prophetic dialogue with people of Asian cultures. In other words, prophetic dialogue with people of other cultures is a way for the Christian churches to become local churches: "True inculturation, far from being a tactic for the propagation of the faith, belongs to the very core of evangelization, for it is the continuation in time and space of the dialogue of salvation initiated by God and brought to a culmination when he uttered his Word in a very concrete historical situation."[93]

The relationship between popular piety and culture was supplied by the ITC and CDWDS. ITC, for instance, said: "Without any doubt whatsoever, popular piety can bring an irreplaceable contribution to a Christian cultural anthropology which would permit the reduction of the often tragic division between the faith of Christians and certain socio-economic institutions, of quite different orientation, which regulates their daily life."[94] On the other hand, CDWDS stated: "In genuine forms of popular piety, the Gospel message assimilates expressive forms particular to a given culture while also permeating the consciousness of that culture with the content of the Gospel, and its idea of life and death, and [human being's] freedom, mission and destiny."[95]

SM is undoubtedly a simple and excellent work of inculturation of de Rhodes in Vietnam. Looking at its form and content, one can assure that the Gospel message is genuinely performed in the Vietnamese culture. As Phan said, "popular religion will assume a greater role in inculturation as a more adequate understanding of this religious phenomenon is

93 Rosales and Arévalo, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 1: 94.

94 ITC, *Faith and Inculturation,* 1998. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html (accessed on November 24, 2016), no. 7.

95 CDWDS, *DPPL*, no. 63.

gained."[96] This idea validates SM because it simultaneously indicates how to live the faith and the local culture.

## Standing Meditation and Prophetic Dialogue with Non-Christians

Dialogue with non-Christians or people of other religions is the last of the three great and urgent concerns of the universal Church and the local Church in Vietnam—for the majority of the Vietnamese are "believers."[97] They believe in and worship *Ông Trời* (the Heavenese Religion), and venerate their ancestors (*Đạo Ông Bà/Filial Religion*). In this context, we understand "dialogue with Non-Christians" as "dialogue with people of other religions."[98]

Inter-religious dialogue is a significant challenge to evangelization in Vietnam. It is an activity that is carried out and lived by the people. In this manner, inter-religious dialogue "does not occur between religions but between and among believers of the different religions... [It] is done by people who have faith, who are adherents of a 'system' of belief and

96 Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, xii.

97 According to official statistics of the Vietnamese government, aside from the Indigenous religion and three traditional religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) from China, there are many other religions such Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Hoahaoism, Caodaism, Islam… There are around 24 million people identified with one of the recognized organized religions, out of 93,421,835.00 million of population. Of these, 81.69.3 percent are Non-Religions, 7.93 percent are Buddhists, 6.62 percent are Catholics, 0.86 percent are Protestants, 1.67 percent are Hoahaoists, 1.01 percent are Caodaists, and 0.22 percent are others. Meanwhile, Pew Research Center has a different survey from the government: 45.3 percent are Indigenous Believers, 16.4 percent are Buddhists, 8.2 percent are Christians, 29.6 percent are Non-Religions, and 0.5 percent are others (from https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tôn_giáo_tại_Việt_Nam (accessed on November 28, 2016)).

98 Pope John Paul II, *RM*, no. 55.

who identify themselves as belonging to a faith tradition or religion."[99]

John Paul II was the first pope who discussed inter-religious dialogue in *RM*.[100] He understood inter-religious in a broader meaning. According to him, inter-religious dialogue is "understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, [it] is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions." [101] Especially, he noticed "that salvation comes from Christ, and that dialogue does not dispense from evangelization... The Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in inter-religious dialogue..." [102]

Six months later, the PCID and the CEP issued "Dialogue and Proclamation" in which inter-religious dialogue is understood more deeply. [103] More importantly, it offered four forms of dialogue to evangelization:

a) The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

b) The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

99 John Christian U. Young, "Popular Religiosity and the Dialogue with Islam: A Theological Schema," *Missio Inter Gentes* 2, no.1 (January, 2016): 34-35.

100 Pope John Paul II, RM, nos. 55-57.

101 Ibid., no. 55.

102 Ibid., no. 55.

103 PCID, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, no. 77.

c) The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

d) The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.[104]

Given the nature of SM as a popular Catholic devotion, the dialogue of theological exchange cannot be an approach of the prophetic dialogue because SM does not seek a deep understanding of the intellect. It simply manifests "a certain thirst for God" of the poor and the simple. However, the three other forms of dialogue can be observed in SM because it is where convergences and commonalities between faith traditions are apparent. This is especially true in the context of Vietnamese faith traditions.

Pope Francis mentions that interreligious dialogue must be open and respectful. It is a process of both giving and receiving. It would not be a dialogue when one party only gives to the other party, or one party only receives from the other party:

> [Through inter-religious dialogue,] we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking, and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue that seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment that brings about a new social situation. Efforts made in dealing

104 Ibid., no. 42.

> with a specific theme can become a process in which, by mutual listening, both parts can be purified and enriched. These efforts, therefore, can also express love for truth.[105]

Similarly, theologians such as Jacques Dupuis, Michael Amaladoss, Edgar G. Javier, and Peter C. Phan also agree that dialogue with people of other religions should be a process of both "giving" and "receiving," "speaking" and "listening," and "enriching" and "purifying" of partners. For instance, Dupuis wrote:

> Christians have something to gain from the dialogue. They will drive a twofold, combined advantage. On the one hand, they will win an enrichment of their own faith. Through the experience and testimony of the other, they will be able to discover at greater depth certain aspects, certain dimensions, of the Divine Mystery that they had perceived less clearly and that has been communicated less clearly by Christian tradition. At the same time, they will gain a purification of their faith. The shock of the encounter will often raise questions, force Christians to revise gratuitous assumptions, destroy deep-rooted prejudices or overthrow certain narrow conceptions or outlooks.[106]

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam (CBCV) has expressed its concern for the task of inter-religious dialogue to evangelization. It is aware that the Vietnamese Catholic Church needs to accompany the local peoples in "living the Gospel message in the reality of the society."[107] This is considered the evangelical orientation of the Church

105 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 250.

106 Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Obis Books, 1997), 382.

107 CBCV, "Pastoral Letter 1980," http://hdgmvietnam.org/giao-hoi-cong-giao-viet-nam-va-no-luc-truyen-giao-50-nam-qua-3/2388.63.8.aspx (accessed on September 28, 2016).

in Vietnam since the 1980s. The CBCV issues pastoral letters as missionary directions expressing concern with people of other religions by living in solidarity with, respecting, and loving them as a part of doing mission.[108]

Focusing on SM as a *locus* where inter-religious prophetic dialogue occurs, it can be said that it is a place where all people can meet one another. Hence, the three forms of dialogue offered by the PCID are fit for SM. It is a place where the dialogue of life occurs for the participants, so they can "live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations."[109] When they live together in harmony, they can "collaborate for the integral development and liberation of the people."[110] They can enrich and purify the faith of one another because all are rooted in the Vietnamese culture.

## Conclusion

SM is as a *locus theologicus* against which we portray various images of Jesus and draw a popular Christian spirituality that is significant and relevant to the Vietnamese people. This is called "faith seeking understanding." However, SM is also a resource of theology in Vietnam for doing "faith seeking expression."

John Paul II has said: "Evangelization is a matter of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love."[111] This means that faith must be expressed in concrete missionary activities. Through missionary expressions, one shows

108 CBCV, "Pastoral Letter 2015," http://hdgmvietnam.org/hoi-dong-giam-muc-viet-nam-ket-thuc-hoi-nghi-thuong-nien-ky-ii-2015/7299.63.8.aspx (accessed on September 28, 2016), no.3.

109 PCID, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, no. 77.

110 Ibid.

111 Pope John Paul II, *RM*, no. 11.

how he/she accepts, internalizes, and lives his/her Christian faith.

In this manner, SM is a precious approach or tool for proclaiming the Good News. By practicing SM, the Vietnamese people express their cultural way of accepting, internalizing, and living their Christian faith. SM is a very good expression through which the seed of the Gospel takes root in the Vietnamese culture. Furthermore, SM is a place where prophetic dialogue can be done as an approach for missionary evangelization.

In sum, SM is a precious instrument of evangelization that can be used to express God's mercy in today's Vietnamese society. Mercy is God's first action of mission, and "Christ is the 'eternal Gospel' (Rev. 14: 6); He 'is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13: 8),' yet his riches and beauty are inexhaustible."[112]

112 Pope Francis, *EG*, no. 11.

# Using Imagination in Teaching Christian Doctrine in Religious Education

*Maria Socorro T. Bacani*

The Christian life is based on the conviction that God has spoken to humanity and has revealed the central truths of faith.[1] In Christian religious parlance, revelation refers to the free manifestation of God, which lies beyond the normal reach of human inquiry. This revelation is normally mediated through ordinary human experiences in the world; through symbol–that is to say, through an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define. Revelatory symbols express God's self-communication[2] and revelation reaches human beings through symbols, primarily on the level of imagination. This article explores the use of imagination in teaching the Christian faith, drawing from the insights of John Henry Newman, Sandra M. Schneiders, and William F. Lynch on how imagination can address some problems in teaching Christian doctrine.

## Use of Imagination in Education

### What is Imagination?

There are three common misconceptions about imagination. First, imagination is often equated with illusion or fantasy,

1 Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: CBCP/ECCCE, 2005), no. 61.

2 Avery Dulles, "The Symbolic Structure of Revelation," *Theological Studies* 41, no. 1 (March 1980): 55-56, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398004100102.

with things that are fanciful, irrational, and detached from reality. Second, imagination is sometimes deemed an undesirable quality because it is associated with useless play. Third, imagination is seen as an obstacle to objective knowledge and truth, with imagined things as unreliable sources of knowledge or insight. If one follows the above misconceptions, one might conclude that imagination cannot be used in teaching.

However, human imagination is precisely the power to represent *the real* more fully and truly than it appears to the senses and in its ideal and universal character.[3] The human mind has the creative ability to see reality—what is real—and also to express both what is not present to the senses now and what is beyond sensible reality. As the great philosopher Aristotle claims, there is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses.[4] Therefore, human imagination is the creative capacity to go beyond immediate sensible data to form, recall, and relate ideas and objects presented by the senses. The special power of the imagination is its ability to draw together the concrete, specific *reality* sensed and its universal idea or concept.[5] Brelsford affirms that

> Imagination is productive and necessary for knowledge, rather than a fantastical impediment to true knowledge. Rather than an impediment to true knowledge, the creative processes of human imagination lead to reliable knowledge of the real world.[6]

3 Frederick G. McLeod, "Imagination within the Act of Faith," *Review for Religious* 46 (March/April 1986): 214.

4 *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), s.vv. "Aristotle."

5 Phillip S. Keane, *Christian Ethics and Imagination* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 81.

6 Theodore Brelsford, "Religious Imagination as Problem," *Religious Education* 110, no. 3 (May 2015): 251, https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2015.1039357

Imagination is the ability of the human mind to generate, give birth to, or produce new knowledge from fragments of existing knowledge. It is productive because it creates new learning and is, therefore, necessary for growth in knowledge. It must be understood as an important aspect of human knowledge and an essential part of the process of teaching and learning.

There are three dimensions of imagination[7] that are essential to teaching: process, content, and action. First, imagination is a core process through which transformative learning occurs by which the mindset of students can radically change. Second, imagination is the power to give form to human knowing, the capacity to name the content of human thought by employing images, especially in teaching. And third, imagination is an act of creativity because it manifests embodied action in the world, moving and directing the human mind, heart, and hand to drive a person to concrete action. When teachers evoke the students' imagination, students are led towards creative engagement of the world, and teaching can become truly effective and life-transforming.

When these three dimensions of imagination are engaged in teaching, the educational process brings about positive change in the students' way of thinking, feeling, and acting. The students can articulate their experiences by using images and interpreting them as significant factors in understanding the meaning of their experiences. They are inspired to act upon their realizations and insights and translate them into concrete gestures that can contribute to the transformation of society.

7 Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 139-41.

## Understanding Students in Today's Digital Culture

Digital culture is an overarching concept used to describe the pervasive influence of technology and limitless access to information through the internet that significantly shapes the way people think, behave, communicate, and interact.[8] The digital culture is not a parallel reality to the real world, although they are currently intertwined, and their mutual influence can no longer be ignored. The term digital natives refer to the people who have been reared within this culture.

> The number of digital natives is growing. By 2020, there will be approximately 4.25 billion 'digital natives' under the age of 34. The number of 'net experienced' people in the aging part of the population is also growing – what will this mean for the Networked Society? . . . The generation of people born 1985 or later have grown up in a world of computers, mobile phones, and the internet – and this has shaped them and their time. The adoption of these tools is continuing to shape their behavior, and as Marshall McLuhan, a media education expert, said, "The medium is the message" – that is, the medium influences how the message is perceived.[9]

A number of characteristics of these digital natives are worth pointing out. First, they have a new category of time and space. There is no longer a delineation between the real and virtual worlds. Whether within or outside the internet—whether online or offline—they freely move as if both worlds are one and the same environment instantaneously and simultaneously. Everything and everyone becomes accessible

8 Clayton d'Arnault, "What is Digital Culture?" *Digital Culturist Blog,* October 21, 2015, https://digitalculturist.com/what-is-digital-culture-5cbe91bfad1b (accessed March 24, 2017).

9 Mikael Eriksson Björling, "Why is Innovation the Buzzword Right Now?" *Ericsson Blog,* March 27, 2018, https://www.ericsson.com/en/blog/2018/3/why-is-innovation-the-buzzword-right-now (accessed July 9, 2021).

right here and now with just a click of the mouse or a touch of a digital screen. For the digital natives, the here and now matters most. They are fast responders delivering immediate responses and are also visually-spatially proficient at integrating the visual with the physical. One example that illustrates this is the interactive videogames that simulate particular life scenes and require both keen attention to visual and active physical participation.

Second, digital natives are multi-sensory. They can grasp and understand better when all their senses are stimulated: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, and detecting and decoding unspoken messages. Visual images, sounds, and hands-on activities are more engaging for them. In short, digital culture is participatory. While digital natives are content-makers and sharers, they can also see an underlying thread that connects seemingly fragmented images and messages. They are inductive discoverers who can learn through discovery rather than explanation and are searchers who are ever eager for additional or deeper information. They gather information from multiple sources and are likely to overview or scan vast amounts of information quickly. They can read and interpret visual images and icons, easily switching from linear to parallel thinking.

Third, digital natives are adept at multi-tasking, capable of doing several tasks simultaneously without being distracted. They can study, listen to music, chat with friends online, prepare a project, and eat their meals all at the same time. They can change and shift their mental channels without any effort at all. They are actually quite attentive in all these tasks even if they do not appear so. Adults often judge them to be superficial, but this is not actually the case. They are good at

shifting attention between tasks and are quickly adapting to constant change.

However, digital natives are also at risk. While they often seem cool and smart, they also express their need for guidance and points of reference as they navigate the digital world. The addictive influence of new media threatens to misinform—and deform—young people's thinking, choices, and actions. The Synod of Bishops recognizes the inherent risk the digital culture brings to people:

> ... when the digital culture is taken to an extreme [that] includes selfish concentration on oneself and personal needs; an overemphasis on the emotive aspects of relations and social bonds; the loss of objective values of experience, reflection and thought, which are reduced in many cases, to ways of reconfirming one's individualistic feelings; the progressive alienation of the moral and social dimensions of life which makes others a mirror of self or simply a spectator to one's actions; and finally, the formation of a culture centered on passing novelties, the present moment and outward appearances, indeed, a society which is incapable of remembering the past and with no sense of the future.[10]

The digital culture is thus a fertile ground for the imagination to thrive and be used to its highest potential. Imagination can help these digital natives to recognize the perduring values in human life, such as authentic friendship, commitment, and loving relationships. Students of today are native speakers of the digital language of computers, internet, mobile phones,

10 Synod of Bishops, "The Vocation and mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World," Vatican Archive, December 9, 2014, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141209_lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html (accessed at July 9, 2021).

and social media. Instant messaging and virtual connectivity form an integral part of their daily lives.

Teachers who were not born in the digital world are called digital immigrants who need to adapt to this digital environment, learning the new language but frequently retaining their native accent as seen in their old ways of thinking and doing things. These digital immigrant teachers often appear to the students as foreigners speaking an almost unintelligible language when they lecture to them, leaving students wondering just what they are saying because they cannot connect.

Teachers need to realize that their students grew up to the twitch speed of video games and MTV, honed to the instantaneity of hypertext, instant messaging, downloaded music, mobile phones readily on hand, and e-libraries on their tablets and netbooks. They are networked and online most of the time, having little patience for lectures and step-by-step patterns of instruction and learning. More often than not, digital natives feel that the lessons of their digital immigrant teachers are not worth paying attention to, especially compared to the multi-sensory experience offered them by media in all the various forms of media. And yet teachers blame them for not paying attention.

Instead, teachers have to rethink their methodologies and start learning to communicate in the language and style of their students. It does not mean changing the meaning or content of what is truly important, but saying them in a way that keeps up with the pace and speed of their students (i.e., in a less step-by-step approach, more in parallel thinking, and making use of images that speak more convincingly to them). It is a real challenge for digital immigrant teachers to use their own imagination to discover how to teach these digital natives more effectively.

## Imagination for Effective Teaching and Learning

Effective education in the classroom is marked by knowledge generation and proactive participation, which calls for the intentional or purposeful use of the imagination. Participation in what is imagined makes imagination intentional and meaningful. Imagination is always related to and informed by a memory which provides continuity with the past and becomes a point of reference that lead to new and deeper meaning.[11] In fact, imaginative teaching is an intentional act that involves: 1) respect for students' subjectivity and inherent nature to explore; 2) allowance of space for the use of their senses and interpretative ability; 3) thoughtfully imposed limits for them to break from conventional thought and action, and 4) collaborative learning that develops in them an empathic appreciation for different perspectives.[12]

These four essential elements come into play when the teacher creatively engages the students in interactive learning that goes way beyond paper and pen, chalk-talk, or whiteboard approach in education. One can imagine a different kind of classroom setting where the students take an active role in the different moments of the class and the teacher becomes the guide that directs the whole process of education with clarity and creativity.

Imagination operates by involving the human senses, reason or intelligence, will, and emotions. This happens in a three-step process. First, imagination is triggered by data coming from experience (i.e., a word or phrase, music or

11 Catherine Dooley, "Give Imagination a Chance!" *Living Light* 38, no. 1 (Fall 2021): 21.

12 Christopher Cunningham, "Imagination: Active in Teaching and Learning," July 1, 2015, http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=teachlearnstudent (accessed on December 5, 2016).

sound, a taste or smell, a picture or a place).[13] Through the five senses of touch, hearing, sight, taste, and smell, the ordinary sensation and perception processes occur. Imagination forms images that come from something known through experience. Second, reason or intelligence controls and suspends judgment while comparing and contrasting the images formed as a direct response to emotions evoked by the sensible reality perceived. Senses bring out new insights and broaden horizons. Third, through imagination, students can explore and expand their understanding evoked by the creative use of their senses and their capacity for an "out of the box" interpretation.

Imagination fosters effective teaching and learning in three ways: first, imagination enables students to see possibilities. It discloses a reality that does not yet exist but is possible. In remembering images formed by the interplay of all the senses, a new way of looking at persons and events and new insights are born. Imagination is about

> ... awakening and disclosure of hope in situations of concrete particularity where meaning is reduced to the limits of what we already see, hear, and expect. To be hopeful in a world where wholeness, community, and peace for persons and groups so often remain "unseen, unheard, and unexpected" requires an imaginative capacity to transcend the possible and the already-known.[14]

Second, imagination generates empathy that enables students to put themselves in another person's place or situation. It "feeds one's capacity to feel one's way into another

13 Dooley, "Give Imagination as Chance!," 20.

14 Joyce Ann Mercer, "Editorial: Imagination and Religious Education," *Religious Education* 111, no. 4 (August 2016): 345, https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2016.1201996.

vantage point"[15] and makes empathy possible. It is an aspect of cognitive capacity that gives credence to alternative realities. This means that one becomes open to possibilities other than what is familiar and commonplace experience. Empathy becomes a requisite part of education in contexts ever more diverse and complex, in which the ability to join with others depends on empathic regard for those whose viewpoints or life situations may be quite different from one's own.[16] People become open to welcoming differences more as a richness rather than impoverishment and more as a venue for unity despite diversity rather than a dividing factor.

Third, imagination fosters transformation that enables students to change for the better. It begins with forming images that evoke new ways of looking at reality and give rise to new insights that challenge old ways of perception and understanding. Imagination enables individuals to relate these new insights and realizations with concrete experience of persons and events that can become a paradigm for a new way of being and doing. In her talk, "Teaching and the Imagination," Yale School of Divinity professor Dr. Emilie M. Townes affirmed that imagination liberates and educates for transformation.[17]

The experience of Dr. Townes is an example of how imagination becomes an essential part of transformative education. She described herself as a Black middle-class girl headed toward womanhood in the South in the late 1950s until the early 1970s. She and her family experienced racial discrimination, which puzzled her, and she struggled against it as

15 Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 36-37.

16 Mercer, "Editorial: Imagination and Religious Education," 346.

17 Ibid., 345.

something that makes absolutely no sense. She underscored the power of life-changing education wherein she was taught to dream, and in the process, she realized that to dream is to put a high value in cultivating one's imagination. Through imagination, she was able to see new images that counter racism and everything else that devalues and denigrates life and human dignity.

Through transformative education, a radical shift happened in her thoughts, feelings, and actions, i.e., in her way of being in the world, her understanding of self and others, and her way of relating with them. She attributed to imagination the power to liberate and educate for transformation which will "challenge our students, ourselves and the educational structures we are in to dream of more expansive and just spaces for people to live in—and not a space for a special select few, and not only do we dream it, we build it."[18] Townes challenged herself, her students, and the educational structures to dream of more expansive and just spaces for people to live in – and not a space for a special select few, and not only to dream it but to build it.[19] Through the use of imagination, the process of transformative education can be carried out effectively even today.

## Imagination and Teaching the Faith

Christian faith is kept alive through imagination because faith is embodied in symbolic language metaphor, parable, psalms, and myth. Similarly, Christian faith can only be

18 Emilie M. Townes, "Teaching and Imagination," *Religious Education* 111, no. 4 (August 2016): 367-368, https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2016.1191586.

19 Transformative Learning Center, "Teaching for Change: Engaging in Transformative Education," http://www.teaching4change.edu.au/node/4 (accessed February 14, 2017).

appropriated by a corresponding act of imaginative insight.[20] Christian doctrines are the high expressions of human imaginative insight because—as St. Augustine suggests— God is a poet, and He communicates with His creature in an imaginative mode. Human response to the divine cannot but take the same imaginative form. The urgent challenge for teachers is how to inspire students to use imagination in keeping the faith irresistibly vital, especially for today's hyper-connected generation.

## Three Common Problems in Teaching the Faith

*NCDP* 248 identifies a common weakness among religion teachers: the presentation of doctrines merely "as a factual information, or as abstract, impersonal propositions that have to be memorized as head knowledge, but with little or no practical relevance to daily life." This way through which doctrines are taught makes them appear as static dead formulas (*NCDP* 249).

Based on the experience of religion teachers, three major problems in religious education can be identified: 1) faith is often reduced to simply notional concepts, at times depicting itself as unreal or fantastic ideas; 2) the Christian faith is presented as something floating, because it is not presented as intrinsically grounded in Sacred Scriptures, Church teaching, and human experience; and 3) faith is diminished to trite, partial, and fragmented pieces of information, with its depth of meaning impoverished and *essential paradoxical characteristics ignored*.

20 Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

## John Henry Newman's Religious Imagination

John Cavadini, the former chair of the theology department in Notre Dame University, observes that many Catholics remain ignorant of their faith[21] even after years of being educated in Catholic schools. He blames the problematic way of teaching the faith that has emphasized head knowledge of the Christian faith, thus failing to integrate faith into life. This troublesome way of teaching the faith has simply made students repeat facts and figures that are often repetitious, boring, irrelevant, far-fetched from their life experience, disconnected from their search for answers and meaning in life, from their aspirations for what matters, from their thirst for something more, and their longing for authenticity and true happiness.

Imagination needs to be recovered if religious education is to be truly what it is—an education in the faith which is illuminative (faith that seeks understanding), performative (faith that does justice), and fiducial (faith that worships and prays). A major challenge for teachers is how to teach in a manner that brings out the role of the imagination as a real grasping, living, and communicating of the truths of the Christian faith. There is a need to go beyond transmitting facts and figures which do not touch or inspire the students' lives. Teachers' capacity to evoke the students' imagination needs to be enhanced.

Imagination is fundamental to the Christian faith. Imagination involves seeing spiritual reality through material reality. Revelation is mediated through material reality, making use of visible signs to manifest invisible realities and passing the way of the finite to to the infinite. And it is

21 John C. Cavadini. "Ignorant Catholics: The Alarming Void in Religious Education," *Commonweal* (April 9, 2004): 12-14.

imagination that enables the believer to see what is invisible to the eye, fostering a real grasp of the faith that is necessary for the integration of faith and life.

John Henry Newman says that religious imagination leads to faith as a real grasp of the Christian truth. His insights on religious imagination maintain that imagination is the experiential contact between God and human persons always and everywhere. Revelation takes root in the concrete and living soil of communal experience, and above all, in the imagination. For Newman, faith as a real grasp of Christian truth always involves concrete historical engagement and participation, a living assent that must be kindled anew in Christian communities.[22]

Imagination, for Newman, is the "total act by which we take hold of a real object."[23] It is an ability to take hold of God as the real object of faith in one's personal experience that calls for self-appropriation or subjective integration that, in turn, leads to personal conversion. The objective dimension of faith (the content – *fides quae*) must be integrated with the subjective, existential, experiential dimension (the act of believing – *fides qua*) that makes for the faith response of the person. Religious imagination is necessary for understanding faith in its three essential characteristics.

First, religious imagination is a real grasp of faith and a dynamic assent to faith because it is based on a positive understanding of the mystery. Faith's relevance to life is implied in what Newman termed as "real" as the opposite of "notional" which is detached from decision and commitment.

22 Christopher Pramuk, "'They Know Him By His Voice': Newman on the Imagination, Christology, and the Theology of Religions," *Heythrop* 48, no. 1 (January 2007): 61-85.

23 Terrence Merrigan, *Clear Head and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991), 50.

If religious imagination is disregarded in teaching the faith, the great realities of faith, such as loving communion, can remain vague, conceptual, or "unreal." With religious imagination, loving communion, like faith itself, will not remain a "notional" or pious exhortation but can take fire and flesh, becoming a source of dynamic conversion and action.[24]

Second, religious imagination is subjective or person-centered. Imagination fosters a positive understanding of the mystery of faith that is holistic and coherent, calling for an owning and integrating this understanding in one's personal life. Newman calls this as "a living hold on truths,"[25] or faith as lived experience. This characteristic of religious imagination relates to the integration within the person, the subject who believes. Compared to the idea of faith as pure abstract thinking prevalent during his time, Newman's approach to faith is personalist. For Newman, faith is based on a person's spiritual and moral qualities and lived dispositions. Faith involves a process of personally discovering the truth and acting on it. It is the capacity to grasp what is real that begins from one's personal seeking and finding. In his book *Grammar of Assent,* he calls faith as "imaginative assent." The positive role of imagination in faith is to realize faith, in the sense of making God real in a person's life.[26]

Third, religious imagination is holistic because it integrates faith's subjective and objective dimensions. Both its objective content (what is believed) and its subjective aspect (the act of believing) bear the two sides of the paradoxical character of

24 Michael Paul Gallagher, "The Quality of Mercy: Pope Francis' Vision for Today's Culture," a talk delivered in the Loyola School of Theology's Theological Hour, August 27, 2014.

25 Magill, "Newman's Moral Imagination," 458.

26 Michael Paul Gallagher, *Faith Maps: Ten Religious Explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2010), 14-15.

faith. Through the use of religious imagination, the person assents to what is believed (content) in a personal way that touches the heart and transforms life (act). Such integration is necessary for a holistic personal response of faith to God within a community of faith.

The salvific truths of faith are essentially interrelated and interconnected as the whole deposit of the revelation of God. By relating them to one another, the meaning of the truths greatly abounds. To understand any particular doctrine means to see its connections with the other truths of the faith. For example, to understand the doctrine of the Incarnation means seeing the connections, implications, and consequences of the Word of God becoming flesh to the doctrine of creation and redemption. sThe use of imagination assists the individual in ascertaining the interrelations of the truths of faith and their relation to human life.

For Newman, "the heart is commonly reached, not through reason, but through the imagination."[27] He underlined that "faith needs to be discerned, rested in, and appropriated as a reality, by the religious imagination"[28] which gives "a living hold on truths" and opens the door towards "habits of personal religion."[29] Unless religious truth touches a person's imagination, it will fail to become personally alive.[30] The objective dimension of faith touches and transforms the person's heart by passing through religious imagination. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, for instance, the image of the father evokes in the reader sentiments of mercy and compassion for the sinner who is not a stranger but his own son who was starving

27 John Henry Newman, *Grammar of Assent* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1995), 92.

28 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 98.

29 Ibid., 117.

30 Michael Paul M. Gallagher, "Karl Rahner: The Magnetism of Mystery," in *Faith Maps* (New York: Paulist, 2010), 15.

to death and abandoned; while the image of the prodigal son presents an image of humility and repentance. Conversion is often brought about when the heart is touched by God's merciful love represented through powerful images.

Newman's religious imagination is the locus where faith could become spiritually real. The focus is not on pure thinking but on the process of discovering the truth and acting on it. This is what Newman refers to as "real assent." The opposite of real is notional, implying an intellectualism detached from decision and commitment. The imagination, and not the intellect on its own, is the human sensibility where the realities of faith are best discerned and appropriated. Acceptance of the truths of faith can remain cold and ineffective; when imagination is not kindled, and hearts are not inflamed. But truth can work "a revolution in the mind" when it is "held in the imagination" and embraced with real assent."[31] Imagination that is awakened and rekindled addresses faith that has become impersonal and becomes fruitfully existential. It touches and transforms a person's life**.**

Through religious imagination, a person arrives at a certitude and concrete religious commitment rather than through mere intellectual reflection. It is an understanding that goes beyond analysis and logical reasoning.[32] Imagination is the capacity to recognize the truth and be certain about it through converging clues that affirm the truth that are grasped intuitively. God becomes real to the human heart. Faith does not remain at the notional level, but it leads a person to a change of heart.[33] Only when a religious truth touches the imagination can it become personally alive and transforming.

31 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 126-27.

32 "Karl Rahner: The Magnetism of Mystery," 16.

33 Ibid., 22.

## Sandra Schneiders's Paschal Imagination

Another problematic way of teaching the Christian faith is presenting the truths as partial, floating pieces of information that have no historical roots and bear no relevance to life because these are not related to Sacred Scriptures, Church Teaching, and human experience.

Christian doctrines are often taught as separate topics in themselves without interconnections. Students cannot see the interconnections of the truths of faith when imagination is not engaged. Furthermore, doctrines are not presented as saving truths of faith that are grounded in Scriptures from which they derive their meaning and purpose for salvation. They are not explained and deepened as part of the living Tradition of the Church, thus reinforcing the tendency of reducing them into empty and dead formulas that only serve as objects for the mental exercise of memorization in view of a pen and paper exam.

However, the truths of faith are not alien to the human person. They are intrinsically related to a person's being and becoming. For instance, when one professes faith in God as the Creator of Heaven and earth, it is implied that one also affirms being a creature dependent on God for his existence and fully trusting in Him because it is in Him that one lives, moves, and exists (cf. Acts 17:28).

Sandra Schneiders's paschal imagination inspires a holistic understanding of Christian faith that is grounded in Scriptures, Church teaching, and human experience. Paschal imagination urges for a holistic interpretation of Scripture. It is a constructive imagination that intends to show the interconnection of the past, present, and future in reference to Christ. Jesus Christ is the same Risen Saviour for all times and seasons—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This imagination

has a concrete effect on the whole cognitive-affective capacity of the person under the influence of the Spirit of Jesus, which enables the person to grasp the paschal wholeness and character of the event and thus enter into an existential participation in Christ's mystery.[34]

This Paschal imagination has the power to influence the past, present, and future of a Christian's life. By reimagining their past journey with Jesus, the early Christians saw new connections and insights about who Jesus was and who they were. They discovered new meanings and deeper reasons for interpreting their present life, and they gained greater hope to move towards the future with the glorified Risen Jesus.[35]

Schneiders asserts that the Gospels are the product of paschal imagination. The first Christians exercised their paschal imagination, inspired by the Spirit, in giving witness to the Risen Christ. The witness is recorded is the New Testament texts.[36] In the same vein, this paper proposes to see Christian doctrine as a fruit of the paschal imagination of the Church who continues to witness to Christ in the Christian doctrines it professes. As such, Paschal imagination can also be used to view participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ as the optic from which to understand Christian faith. By showing how Christian faith flows from the living Word of God in Scriptures through paschal imagination, the truths of faith come alive as saving truths.

Schneiders's paschal imagination can be adapted as a way to understand Christian faith more holistically. The saving

34 Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 208-18.

35 Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 107.

36 Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 107.

message of the doctrines of faith can be interpreted and deepened in the light of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Paschal imagination is possible through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who always leads Christians to remember the image of Christ as redemptive or salvific. The paschal image of Christ is always redemptive because through it believers come in contact with the one who lived and died a truly free life in the past, but is now risen and alive, and is eschatologically seated in glory with the Father.[37]

As the Gospels are the fruit of the paschal imagination of the early Church, Christian faith can also be seen as a response to God's revelation, a response borne from the paschal imagination of the Church over time. With the use of paschal imagination, the same characteristics of the Jesus-image of the early Christians can now be attributed to the Christian faith in order to bring out its holistic meaning.

First, Christian faith must be taught not with static facts but as a dynamic reality. Christian faith is ever-evolving and developing because it is alive and dynamic, always open to new horizons. It is much more like a stream of an ever-flowing river of life than a museum piece from bygone days.[38] The living truths of Christian faith, which stem from God's revelation, are not static conceptual content but the dynamic self-gift of the living God.[39] They are not dead formulas because they are grounded on God's living Word in Scriptures and are the constitutive elements of the living Tradition of the Church whose living faith continues to grow throughout the ages. The

37 Gerald Bednar, *Faith as Imagination: The Contribution of William Lynch, S.J.* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 93.

38 Thomas H. Groome, "Catechesis and Religious Education: Let's Stay Together," *Living Light* 39, no. 3 (1992): 39.

39 Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Paschal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in the New Testament Interpretation," *Theological Studies* 43, no. 1 (March 1982): 65.

Christian truths formulated as doctrines are expressions about God who cannot be fully contained by the Church and draws Christians to what is more beyond themselves. Christian doctrines are a fundamental expression of the nature of the Christian God who relates with his people as Trinity and in whom Christians gain identity through baptism.[40]

Second, the Christian faith must be taught as a guide to interpreting Scriptures and understanding of the Christian life in the light of God's revelation in Christ. These truths are the "rule of faith" that provide a measure or norm for how Christians should read the Scriptures and how they should live. They serve as the basis for reading Scripture as a whole, though they do not exhaust its meaning. They provide a normative guide for Christian life by establishing the right belief (orthodoxy) and the right practice (orthopraxy) resulting from right belief.[41]

Third, Christian faith must be taught as never fully exhausted and articulated. Having its source in the revelation of the living God throughout the history of salvation that finds fulfillment in Christ's Paschal mystery, Christian faith is expressed in doctrines that are articulations of the paschal imagination of the Church from its beginning until the end of time. They are part of the living tradition of a community of faith, and as such, they are constantly enlarged by their interaction with and integration into the theology and spirituality of successive generations. More insightful nuanced reflections about the truths of faith develop through time. One example can be the understanding of the Church from a hierarchical concept to that of being the people of God. This

40 Mark D. Chapman, "Why Do We Still Recite the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist?," *Anglican Theological Review* 87, no. 2 (Sept. 2005), 221-22.

41 Luke Timothy Johnson, "What the Creed Is and What It Does," *The Creed* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 46, 49, 61.

is clearly illustrated in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (9-17). As a consequence, the teaching about Mary as the Mother of God in *Lumen Gentium* (52-69) further deepened and developed into the image of Mary as the Mother of the Church, the people of God and the Model of the Church and of the New Evangelization.

Fourth, the paschal imagination by which Christian faith is articulated, interpreted, understood, and deepened, is bearing upon the past, present, and future of the Church. A concrete example can be given here to illustrate this trans-historical mark of paschal imagination. The formulaic, doctrinal summary of the fundamental Christian truths expressed in the creed probably originated in the liturgical worship of the early Church (past). In the baptismal rite, proclaiming the creed marked the point of transition by which the newly baptized entered the Christian community. Today, the creed now effects that same transition wherein the faithful can enter and participate in the liturgy of the Eucharist (present). The creed draws the reading of the Scripture into a focus on the central mystery of the incarnation and redemption, and toward the hope of a future resurrection (future). Later on, in history, the creed was developed as a way to distinguish between right and wrong beliefs within the community of faith in response to the different heresies that arose.

Fifth, the Christian faith must be taught as the embodiment of living and saving truths since they relate Christians to the God who is loved as Father, Son, and Spirit. The symbolic grasping of the sublime truths is not merely intellectual but an imaginative and affective response. It is the feeling of love working through imagination.[42]

42 Thomas K. Carr, *Newman and Gadamer: Toward a Hermeneutics of Religious Knowledge* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996), 173.

The creed, at its heart, is "belief in a name, and not in notions"[43]—the name of God, which always lies beyond any infinite expression. It is a declaration of belief and trust in the eternal name into which Christians have been baptized, and in which the whole Church and each of its member stands. By professing the truths of faith, Christians claim their absolute dependence in and relationship with the Triune God, drawing them away from reliance on self towards full trust in him.[44] It is not by chance that the word "creed," from the Latin *credere*, which means "to invest one's heart," refers to the fundamental priorities freely chosen by Christians that shape who they are and how they live.[45]

## Lynch's Ironic Christic Imagination

There is the temptation to teach the faith in a one-sided manner. Here, Christian faith is limited to a trite, uni-dimensional, and impoverished meaning. Its holistic expression and paradoxical characteristics are ignored. Teaching the faith that emphasizes only its doctrinal basis becomes dogmatism. Teaching the faith that highlights only its moral aspect results to activism. Teaching the faith that prioritizes only its worship aspect ends up in ritualism.[46] Conversely, all three aspects can be integrated for a truly holistic response of faith through the use of imagination.

Moreover, there is the need to integrate the paradoxical characteristics of faith. To accept only one aspect of reality

43 Chapman, "Why Do We Still Recite the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist," 216.

44 Ibid., 215-217.

45 Thomas H. Groome, "In What Will We Invest? – Risking the Leap of Faith," in *What Makes Us Catholic* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002), 178.

46 The Diagram of Catholic Faith in *NCDP*, footnote for paragraph no. 200 on Faith as Integrated Believing, Doing and Trusting.

would reduce the fullness and richness of its meaning. This is also true for Christian faith. The human person encounters one's rational limits when facing the paradoxes of faith. For instance, on how to reconcile a loving God with the reality of human suffering in the world that He so loved.[47] Faith has two poles[48] that point to impossible tensions of opposites. This means that there are always two seemingly contradictory realities taking place in faith that in reality, do not contradict each other. These two realities "constitute the essential qualities of authentic Christian faith which have to be brought together" (*NCDP* 202) to understand its depth. Faith taken as the interrelation of the two realities is immeasurably richer than taking faith disconnected from the other. A one-sided view of faith is an impoverishment of faith.

William Lynch proposes ironic Christic imagination as key to reconciling the paradoxes and overcoming faith's fragmentation. Ironic Christic imagination is illustrated in the integration of the paradoxical qualities of faith such as: in death, there is life; in losing, one finds; in sadness, there is joy; in the cross, there is victory; in obedience, there is freedom; in darkness, there is light. It is a way to understand Jesus and his mission and understand the paradoxes of faith.

Irony refers to putting together relative opposites that mutually validate each other's truth and value. It is the distinctive paradigm or patterning of facts, a re-composing in which a fact (e.g., "having nothing") is seen within the creative

47 Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic*, 192.

48 Werner Jeanrond, "Faith Formation and Freedom: Categories of Religious Education in the Church," in *Religious Education of Boys and Girls,* ed. Werner G. Jeanrond and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Concilium* 4 (London: SCM Press, 2002), 64.

presence of a contrary (e.g., "and possessing all things").[49] According to Lynch's own words,

> ... imagination composes reality with irony (of co-existing opposites) and with ironic images. Irony deals not with appearances but with the very opposite of appearances and keeps these opposites together in a single act of the imagination. Example, what is power? Who has power? Appearance will say the powerful have power, but the Beatitudes and the sermon on the mount say the opposite. Like imagination itself, faith moves below appearances into existence.[50]

Imagination, for Lynch, is existential, experiential, and involves the whole person, "all his resources, not only his seeing and hearing and touching but also his history, his education, his feelings, his wishes, his love, his hate, faith and unfaith, insofar as they all go into the making of his images of the world."[51]As such, imagination can enlarge itself and encompass reality in its wholeness, paradoxes included, and not just in fragments or pieces.

Three points can be drawn from Lynch's insights: first, ironic Christic imagination attempts to keep diverse relative viewpoints together while acknowledging the extent to which each relative viewpoint is true. In that way, one is prevented from absolutizing one's relative position.[52] Similarly, imagination will always be the enemy of the absolutizing instinct of a reductionist faith because it refuses to present facts as scattered absolutes.[53] Through ironic imagination, a truth is

49 William F. Lynch, *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 14.

50 Lynch, *Images of Faith* , 84.

51 Ibid., 18.

52 Bednar, *Faith as Imagination,* 65.

53 William F. Lynch, *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless (*Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965), 243.

affirmed through seemingly opposite realities. Life comes through death; strength comes through weakness, exaltation through humility, and fullness through emptiness. Truth is seen within the creative presence of its contrary.[54]

Second, ironic Christic imagination is attained through an attentive appropriation or personal owning of the paradigm or pattern of the life of Christ who reconciled paradoxical realities in himself, thus, making it Christic. In the life of Christ, life comes through death, strength through weakness, and exaltation through humility. Imagination attempts to maintain the pattern of transformation that Christ brought about throughout his life.

And third, ironic Christic imagination enables Christians to see who they really are in the new light of the life of Christ. It is attained by embracing one's Christian identity—as a frail human being created to perfect one's freedom in love. Faith must befriend human frailty so that the divine presence can be experienced.[55]

Ironic Christic imagination facilitates the understanding and reconciling of the paradoxical characteristics of faith and Christian life as a whole. The study of the Christian faith hopefully leads the students towards growth in authentic faith and Christian living. They come to realize that faith is certain yet obscure; free yet morally obliging; reasonable yet beyond natural reason; an act yet a process; a divine gift yet a human act; and personal yet ecclesial. These seemingly opposed qualities have to be brought together for an adequate and profound understanding and response of faith (cf. *NCDP* 202). Ironic Christic imagination will overcome a one-sided, reductionist, uni-dimensional, and impoverished understanding. Each

54 Bednar, *Faith as Imagination*, 83.
55 Ibid., 84.

dimension of faith will not be dangerously absolutized while ignoring its other essential aspects. Absolutizing an aspect of the faith is a form of reductionism which can be overcome by affirming the paradoxical characteristics of faith.

To the extent that Christians strive to see the world through the new light of ironic Christic imagination, can they bring the light of faith to bear on the world so that it can see, touch, and experience salvation through the grace of God.[56] If, according to Lynch, imagination involves all the human faculties and resources - and not only one's capacity of seeing and hearing and touching but also one's history, education, feelings, wishes, love - then imagination needs to be Christified so its way of seeing the world could be transformed.

## Conclusion

Imagination can be used to teach the Christian doctrine imparted in an organic and systematic way to lead the students towards the fullness of Christian life. Beyond mere memorization, the essential truths of the Christian faith must be communicated, not as a bare skeletal outline of dead formulas, but in sufficiently complete yet simple, attractive, and captivating terms. Thus, doctrines must be incarnated in the lives of the students.[57] Kieran Scott, a theology and religious education professor, claims that when imagination is not evoked, doctrine becomes ossified, witness, and proclamation wooden, doxologies and litanies empty, consolation hollow and ethics legalistic.[58]

56 Bednar, *Faith as Imagination,* 99.

57 Roche, "Imagination and Integration in the *NCDP* and *CFC*," 64.

58 Kieran Scott, "Tradition and Imagination in Interplay," *Religious Education,* 110, no. 3, 263, https://doi.10.1080/00344087.2015.1039363.

Teaching the faith that evokes the imagination of the students transforms the articulation of the Christian doctrine from mere head knowledge to faith touching the lives of people. With imagination, teaching the faith would be like a sailor who visits many ports and understands how one port relates geographically to another. When imagination is employed in the teaching of the faith, faith will be like viewing the tapestry of Christian doctrine, as it were from the right side of the cloth where connections can be deciphered, and the beauty of the design is appreciated. Imagination can view the correct side of the tapestry, or the artful side that brings threads together in a new and meaningful fashion. We can apply the insights of Newman, Schneiders, and Lynch in the form of three principles:

The first principle is the "loving knowledge principle" which presents faith as real knowledge born out of love and understands Christian doctrine as the mystery of God's self-revelation. This principle is inspired by Newman's religious imagination, which, when awakened and enkindled, renders faith truly personal and existential.[59] Second is the "reality principle" which emphasizes that the teaching of doctrine must have its proper grounding in Scripture, Church teaching, and human experience. This principle is based on Schneider's paschal imagination with which Christian doctrine is understood as dynamic, living, and ever evolving through God's loving wisdom at work in the ongoing salvation history. Schneiders's paschal imagination addresses the problem of irrelevant faith by highlighting the paschal mystery as the lens that integrates Christian doctrines.

Third is the "integration principle" which relates to Lynch's ironic Christic imagination. Ironic Christic imagination pulls

59 Gallagher, "Karl Rahner: The Magnetism of Mystery," 16..

together seemingly contradictory realities of Christian life beginning from the paradoxes of faith. Integration is the key element that brings together in harmony the musical point and counterpoint that composes a single "melodious symphony of truth" (CCC, ii). Lynch describes ironic Christic imagination as a distinctive paradigm or patterning of facts and a re-composing in which reality is seen within the creative presence of a contrary. Life comes through death, strength through weakness, exaltation through humility, and fullness through emptiness.[60] Lynch's ironic Christic imagination responds to the problem of fragmented faith through a dynamic integration of paradoxes.

Teaching faith with imagination harnesses the human capacity to relate the deep realities of faith to our daily experience. The use of imagination in teaching responds to young people's deepest questions and shows the inspiring, life-giving, and transforming gift of the Christian faith. The use of imagination in religious education is essentially related to integration because imagination is the contact point between the spiritual realities of faith and the human capacity for God (cf. CCC, 27-49).

60 Bednar, *Faith as Imagination,* 82-83..

# Canon 915:
## Spirit and Letter of the Law

*Kurt Zion V. Pala, MSSC*

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*Those upon whom the penalty of excommunication or interdict has been imposed or declared, and others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin, are not to be admitted to Holy Communion.*

### Introduction

This particular canon became quite prominent because of the controversies involving Catholic politicians who are supportive of the Reproductive Health Bill in the Philippines or the case of Catholic politicians in the United States who are pro-abortion. Questions like should they be denied receipt of the Holy Communion or even excommunicated were being asked. Other than those above, many have also been refused communion because they were deemed to be "living in sin." In the Philippines and in many parts of the world where the Catholic Church thrives, the Church, both the hierarchy and the laypeople, condemn couples who are not married sacramentally or solemnly in Church as people "living in sin." Those who are homosexuals in public relationships, divorced, and cohabiting are all considered to be "living in sin." Many, because of being tagged as one who is living in sin, decided to leave the Church and join other more welcoming and inclusive churches or remain Catholic but never avail themselves of the sacraments. Many have been hurt and turned off by the very moralistic and rigid attitude of some members of the Church,

including the priests. Should they be refused to receive the Holy Communion as prescribed by Canon 915? As ministers, how do we deal with them pastorally?

## Objective Part

The literary form for Canon 915 seems to be under those canons creating right and duty situations. According to Orsy, these are the true legislative pieces. To interpret them, one should consider bringing into play the sources and resources of the law. Here we have a norm of action imposed on all or some members of the community.[1] The minister of Holy Communion's duty is not to admit those persons in the canon to the participation in the Blessed Sacrament. Observance of this duty on the part of the ministers of Holy Communion will require, in actual practice, the watchful eye of the diocesan bishop.[2] The inclusion of the phrase about those who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" could also give the impression that the canon is also a statement of morality because this particular phrase touches on issues of morality, particularly in the interpretation of what this phrase means according to moral theology.

## Letter of the Law

### Commentaries

The canon, according to the New Commentary on Code of the Canon Law, is directed to individual ministers of

1 Ladislas Orsy, *Theology and Canon Law: New Horizons for Legislation and Interpretation* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 56.

2 Ignatius Gramunt, "Canon 915 Commentary," in *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of the Canon Law*, Edited by Ernest Caparros, Volume MR English Version (Canada: Wilson and Lafleur, 2004), 615-616.

the Eucharist who are to refuse the sacrament in the cases mentioned in the canon.[3] The canon lists down three categories of people to be refused communion: (1) an excommunicated person, (2) an interdicted person, or (3) "others who obstinately persist in manifestly grave sin." Dacanay asserts that the canon is prescriptive. He differentiates it from canon 916. Canon 915 is operative in the public forum, which is directed at the minister of communion while another canon, c. 916, operates in the internal forum, which is addressed to the recipient of the sacrament.[4]

Persons under the third category, those who "...obstinately persist in manifestly grave sin" need to be expounded to understand its full meaning. Dacanay mentions that this category is filled with qualifications: "they do not merely persist, they obstinately persist, their sin is not only grave sin but one that is manifestly so."[5]

It is further defined by the New Commentary on the Code of the Canon Law that ministers are to refuse communion when they are certain of these three conditions: (1) that a person committed a sin that is objectively grave, (2) that the sinner is obstinately persevering in this sinful state, and (3) that the sin is manifest. A manifest sin is one that is publicly known by a large part of the parish or other community. If the sin is not publicly known, refusing communion would be a violation of the person's right to a good reputation (c. 220). The sin in question must be repeated habitually and cannot be

3 *New Commentary on the Code of the Canon Law* (NCCCL), The Canon Law Society of America. Edited by John P. Beal, James A. Coriden and Thomas J. Green (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press 2000), 1110.

4 A.N. Dacanay SJ, *The Sacraments of Initiation: A Commentary on CC 849-958 of the Code of the Canon Law* (Pasig City: Anvil, 2006), 131.

5 Dacanay, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, 132.

applied to a single grave sin, even if manifest, since obstinacy must be obvious.[6]

How is it obstinate? It obstinately perseveres if the minister has expressly warned the offending person to cease committing the sin, but this warning is not heeded. But if there is no advance warning before communion is denied, there is no way for obstinacy to be certain. The warning should include the express threat of refusal of communion to the manifest grave sinner to avoid shaming the person by the public refusal of communion. Here the minister must give the warning to the sinner in the external forum (verbally or written), but it cannot be given if knowledge of the sin is gained from the internal forum.[7]

## Other Authors

Dacanay explains that under the third category, persons in irregular marriages are included. These people may be cohabiting without the benefit of the sacrament of marriage or people who have been divorced from their respective spouses and are now living together on the strength of a merely civil marriage. According to him, the Church proposes two reasons as to why these persons are prohibited to receive the Holy Communion: (1) their state and condition in life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist and (2) pastoral — if these people were admitted to the sacrament, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the teaching of the Church about the indissolubility of marriage.[8]

Woestman enumerates examples of public sinners who are to be refused communion: persons operating abortion

6 NCCCL, 1110.

7 Ibid.

8 Dacanay, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, 133.

facilities, polygamists, persons in invalid marriages, and those persons whose habitual lifestyle is manifestly gravely sinful (e.g., the unmarried "living together," homosexuals or lesbians in a public relationship, those actively participating in the performance of abortions, drug traffickers, gang members). He adds that this canon does not refer to those guilty of occult or secret sins. A sinner has the right to privacy — not to have his/her private sin revealed and reputation be damaged.[9]

According to Peters, there are two distinct but related acts involved in the participation in the Holy Communion: (1) the action of a member of the faithful in seeking communion (reception) and (2) the action of the minister in giving communion (administration). They are performed by different persons and governed by two different canons. He adds that the confusion can be attributed to the failure to keep these two actions distinct. Therefore, he affirms that to recognize the fundamental differences between canon 916 on the reverent reception of the Eucharist and canon 915 on a minister's withholding of Holy Communion is essential in assessing these cases. Yet it is also important to consider that uncertain cases must be decided in favor of reception of the sacrament, even at the risk of sacrilege, while proven cases of public unworthiness as understood by Church law must result in withholding the sacrament, even at the risk of public outcry. Both outcomes are required upon pain of dereliction of ministerial duties in regard to participation in the Eucharist.[10]

9 Woestman, *Canon Law of the Sacraments*, 90-91.

10 Dr. Edward Peters, "Catholics, Communion, and Controversies." https://canonlawblog.wordpress.com/2012/10/31/catholics-communion-and-controversies/ (accessed February 16, 2014).

## Spirit of the Law

According to the Scriptures. The canon has its Scriptural basis from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (11:23-29), where Paul addresses the question of worthiness to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Here he first gives an account of the institution of the Holy Eucharist where the teaching on the Eucharist as Sacrifice and Real Presence is apparent then he admonishes the disciples to examine their consciences before approaching to receive Holy Communion:

> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment against themselves. (1 Cor. 11:27-29)

A commentary on these verses objects that the efficacy of the sacraments does not depend upon the worthiness of men and that nothing is taken away from the promises of God or falls to the ground through the wickedness of men. According to Calvin, Christ's body is presented both to the sinner no less to the good and this is enough so far as concerns the efficacy of the sacrament and the faithfulness of God.[11]

Viewpoint of Vatican II and other documents. Vatican II affirms, the "... liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows" and that "Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is

11 John Calvin, *Commentary on Corinthians Vol. 1 Online.* https://www.ccel.org/ccel/c/calvin/calcom39/cache/calcom39.pdf (accessed February 21. 2014).

present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister "but especially under the Eucharistic species."[12]

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* asserts that "from the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us." However, to be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions. Ministers also must realize that it is their duty to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.[13] *Redemptionis Sacramentum* affirms that the Eucharist is to be offered to the faithful, among other reasons, as an antidote, by which we are freed from daily faults and preserved from mortal sin. It is the Church's custom for each person to examine himself and that anyone who is conscious of grave sin should not celebrate or receive the sacrament without prior sacramental confession except for grave reasons, but one is bound to make an act of perfect contrition and intends to confess as soon as possible. However, the Church also has drawn up norms to foster frequent and fruitful access of the faithful to the sacrament and at the same time determine the objective conditions under which communion may not be given.[14]

Why was the law made? An exegetical commentary on the Code of the Canon Law explains that the immediate context of c. 915 is formed by cc. 912 and 916. Canon 912 stipulates the right of the faithful to participate in the Holy Eucharist, and c. 916 prohibits the exercise of this right to those conscious of grave sin. Further, it is not substantially different from the discipline under c. 855 of the 1917 Code, possibly because this is the norm of a divine-positive law traceable to St. Paul's

12 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Nos. 10 and 7.

13 Ibid., No. 10-11.

14 *Redemptoris Sacramentum*, 80

dictum in 1 Cor. 11:27-29, declared by the Council of Trent in its decree on the Holy Eucharist and restated by Vatican 11.[15]

Although there may be no substantial differences between c. 915 of the 1983 Code and c. 855 of 1917, it is necessary to realize that the historical sacramental context existing at the time of the promulgation of the parallel canon in the 1917 Code and this new Code were very different. Before the practice of frequent and even daily communion was encouraged by then Pope Pius X, most of the faithful only received Holy Communion at Christmas and Easter or at most monthly. With the encouragement and the reform of the Eucharistic fast, today, a very large majority of the faithful receive communion whenever they attend Mass. Under the old practice, there was less danger of the unworthy seeking to receive Communion because of human respect. There was also little or no social pressure to go to communion. Nevertheless, the opposite is true today.[16]

According to Peters, this canon seeks to protect against sacrilege, but it is oriented primarily to preventing scandal. In Catholic moral tradition, a scandal is not behavior that once known will embarrass or compromise the actor, but "an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil." He admits that the canon is not a cure-all for all wounds on the mystical body of Christ, although it does seem to cauterize or sanitize certain wounds until deeper and more satisfying resolutions can be effected.[17]

Pastorally, it is strongly suggested that public denial of Holy Communion be avoided as far as possible. Ministers must strive to explain to the concerned faithful the true

15 Gramunt, c. 915 Commentary, 615.

16 Woestman, *Canon Law of the Sacraments for Parish Ministry*, 84.

17 Peters, "Catholics, Communion, and Controversies."

meaning of the canon in a way that they would understand and respect it. The minister responsible for the ecclesial community is responsible for discerning those situations and giving precise instructions to the deacon or any extraordinary ministers. If the minister must refuse to distribute it to those who are publicly unworthy, the minister must find an opportune time to explain, with extreme charity, the reasons for refusal. It must be done with firmness, conscious of the value that such signs of strengths are for the good of the Church and of souls.[18]

Pope Francis and the Eucharist The Pope, in his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, writes that "The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak". This has pastoral consequences calling us both to be prudent and bold. He confirms that we are like "arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators." He believes that the "Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems".[19]

Further, the Pope's attitude reminds us of Jesus' attitude towards sinners and those deemed by society as unclean and unworthy. The Pope told priests they should welcome couples that live together and championed the courageous and creative choices involved in going out to the "existential peripheries." But he also affirms that the truth factor is crucial here. "The truth must always be told," not just in the dogmatic sense of

18 *Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Declaration on Communion for Divorced and Remarried Persons,* June 24, 2000, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/intrptxt/documents/rc_pc_intrptxt_doc_20000706_declaration_en.html (accessed February 16, 2014), No. 3.

19 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, (accessed February 16, 2014), No. 47.

the world but in the sense of "love and God's fullness." The priest must "accompany" people.[20]

## Subjective Part

My own personal experience of an incident where a man was denied the Holy Communion and learning about certain public cases of incidences where persons had been denied communion provoked me to examine this canon more closely. The difficulty in practice pastorally is how to apply this canon for persons under the third category, persons who "obstinately persist in manifestly grave sin." The difficulty is that the state of a person's conscience belongs to the internal forum, but the canon addresses the minister in the external forum. It is true that as ministers, we have the duty to protect the dignity of the Holy Communion but also the dignity of the person. Denying communion to a person deemed "living in sin" to prevent scandal to the community must be done with more prudence and care. The urgent need might not be to prevent scandal to the community but for mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance of the person. From what I experienced, the denial of communion was taken more scandalous than the reason why the person was denied communion — a public denial of communion shamed the person and is contrary to God's mercy and compassion. Below is an example of the situation I was referring to above.

> Michael is a baptized Indo-Fijian Catholic in the village of Naleba in Labasa on the island of Vanua Levu, the Fiji Islands. He has been living with Clarisa, a Fijian girl, for almost three years now.

20 Vatican Insider — La Stampa, "Francis Urges Priests not to Push Cohabiting Couples Away," https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/en/2013/09/17/news/francis-urges-priests-not-to-push-cohabiting-couples-away-1.35979604, (accessed February 21, 2014).

> They have three sons. They have not been "married" in the Church or civilly. Michael comes from a strong practicing Catholic family. After his father's death, Michael started to miss the Sunday liturgies that are celebrated most Sundays with a priest or a lay minister. On this particular day, that was Christmas day, Michael, together with his whole family, went to church to attend the service after a long time. When communion was about to be given, the people lined up, including Michael, to receive communion. When it came for Micheal's turn, the priest had asked Michael to step aside and refused to give him communion before everyone. Michael, who seemed not to understand what was happening, stepped out of the church and left. It caused a bit of commotion after the Mass. The people started asking what happened, why Michael was refused Holy Communion. The effect was worst for Michael, who was Indian. For them, their "dignity" is very important. To lose it in public is very humiliating. Michael, together with his family, didn't return to church after that incident. Only after some intervention by the lay ministers and other community members did they start to attend church services again.

According to Canon 915, three conditions must be complied with before the minister can licitly deny the person Holy Communion: (1) that a person committed a sin that is objectively grave, (2) that the sinner is obstinately persevering in this sinful state, and (3) that the sin is manifest. Of the three conditions, it seems two are fulfilled: (1) Michael and his wife are cohabiting couples for three years now and that (2) the sin is manifest because most of the community (village) know about the arrangement between Michael and Clarissa as a couple living together outside the Sacrament of Marriage. Nevertheless, condition (3) obstinately persevering is unclear. It is unsure, though, if he was warned or informed

beforehand, so it could not be established if he is obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin.

Personally, I believe it would have been more pastoral to give Michael communion and then later privately speak to him about his situation and what could be done. The situation might not have allowed the priest to talk to Michael before the Mass. Therefore, it would have been more prudent to give him communion as it is highly suggested to avoid a public denial of communion. Further, what goes on in Michael's conscience is perfectly a situation of internal forum and requires greater in-depth investigation on the part of the minister to determine Michael's state of grace or worthiness to receive communion.

## Conclusion

We have explored the various aspects of Canon 915. The canon seemed to be under the category of canons creating right and duty situations and also a statement of morality. Various commentaries assert that it is a canon directed to individual ministers of the Eucharist who are to refuse the sacrament in the cases mentioned in the canon. The prohibition is against three categories of people: (1) an excommunicated person, (2) an interdicted person, or (3) "others who obstinately persist in manifestly grave sin." We also expounded on the meaning of the third category of persons who "...obstinately persist in manifestly grave sin." The conditions must be ascertained by the minister to licitly refuse communion. Irregular marriage was highlighted as an example, but there were other examples given of public sinners who are to be refused communion. The canon is scripturally based on the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (11:23-29). Vatican II affirms the sanctity and importance of the Liturgy and Jesus Christ's Real Presence in the Sacrament, especially under the Eucharistic species. It

is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions. It is also necessary for each person to examine himself at the depth and that anyone who is conscious of grave sin should not celebrate or receive the sacrament without prior sacramental confession except for grave reasons. The Church also has set objective conditions under which Communion may not be given.

The canon seeks to protect against sacrilege, but it is oriented primarily to preventing scandal. Pastorally, it is strongly suggested that public denial of Holy Communion be avoided as far as possible. According to Pope Francis, the Eucharist is "not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak." The difficulty in practice pastorally is how to apply this canon for persons under the third category, persons who "obstinately persist in manifestly grave sin." The state of a person's conscience belongs to the internal forum, but the canon addresses the minister in the external forum. It is true that as ministers, we have the duty to protect the dignity of the Holy Communion but also the dignity of the person. Denying communion to a person deemed "living in sin" to prevent scandal to the community must be done with more prudence and care. The urgent need might not be to prevent scandal to the community but for mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance of the person. In some cases, the denial of communion was taken more scandalous than the reason why the person was denied communion — the public denial of communion shamed the person and is also contrary to God's mercy and compassion.

What could be more pastoral and Christian-like for a minister placed in a situation where he is aware the couple is living together outside marriage would like to receive communion? He should approach them discreetly and engage

them in friendly dialogue — which may help in forming their conscience, enable them to understand, enlighten them and avoid the risk of scandal. To end this short discourse, we turn to Pope Francis, who was quoted by the *Commonweal* magazine saying, "Our duty is to find another way, the just way" to respond to Catholics in irregular marriages. The problem cannot be reduced to "whether they are allowed to take communion or not because whoever thinks of the problem in these terms does not understand the real issue at hand."[21]

21 Michael G. Lawler and Todd Salzman, "Separated Faithful: How Should the Church Handle Divorce and Remarriage?" September 19, 2013, *The Commonweal Magazine.* https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/separated-faithful (accessed February 21, 2014).

# Johannine Mariology in Jn 2:1-11 and Jn 19:25-27

*Azam Mansha, CJM*

The fourth evangelist, John,[1] presents a unique picture of Mary[2] in his writings. A careful study of the Gospel shows the gradual growth of Christology and Mariology in the Johannine Community. In this gradual growth of Mariology, the special role of the Mother of Jesus is significant and visible.[3] Although there is no Infancy Narrative in the fourth

1 By calling "John" as the author of the Fourth Gospel, the presenter is not concluding the ongoing debate on the authorship because "the Gospel itself is anonymous. It does not say who wrote it, and the superscription 'according to John' was added sometime in second century" (For a brief review, see, R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998], 29). There is a quest of the biblical scholars to find the author of the *Fourth Gospel*. On this particular matter, there are two main scholarly schools. The first school holds the tradition of the Church and believes that *John the disciple of Jesus Christ*, son of Zebedee, brother of James, who was among the twelve whom the LORD loved more than others is the author of the Fourth Gospel. The second school of scholars believes that *John the elder*, who lived in Asia Minor is the author of the Fourth Gospel. The debate and research is still going on. The internal evidence claims that it was written or contains material written by an eye-witness, the Beloved Disciple. Unfortunately the identity of the Beloved Disciple is unknown. Culpepper has presented a summarized discussion of the different answers to the question based on internal and external evidences (For a brief review, see, Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 29-37).

2 Interestingly, the proper name of the Mother of Jesus is never mentioned in the Gospel of John. Indeed, John's failure to use the personal name of the Mother of Jesus is striking because John is not shy of that name. The proper name "Mary" almost occurs fifteen times in the Gospel: for Mary the sister of Martha, for Mary Magdalene, for Mary the wife of Clopas. For this study, the personal name of the Mother of Jesus, Mary, is adopted from the Synoptics.

3 Sherri Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *Interpreting the Gospel and Letters of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2017), 116-36; Leon Morris, *John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1995), 25-30, and Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 59-91.

Gospel, unlike Matthew and Luke, Mary plays a substantial role in the ministry of Jesus.[4]

The Johannine Mariology is chiefly found in two pericopes, i.e., Jn 2:1-11 and Jn 19:25-27, but few Johannine experts have not made a link between these two pericopes.[5] However, there are a number of scholars who have made comments on Jn 2:1-11 while studying Jn. 19:25-27.[6] Nevertheless, apart from some modern commentaries, very little has been done in the area of Johannine Mariology in recent years.[7] Besides the

4 Bertrand Buby, "The Fourth Gospel's Icon of Mary," *Mar* 56 (2005):175-86, 175.

5 For a brief review, see, Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 156 and 162; Scott M. Lewis, *The Gospel according to John and the Johannine Letters* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 15-6 and 95 and Scott Gambrill Sinclair, *The Past from God's Perspective: A Commentary on John's Gospel* (North Richland Hills: Bibal Press, 2004), 33 and 328.

6 For a brief review, see, D. Moody Smith, *John, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 83-4 and 359; Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 63-69 and 504; Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Dublin: Columbia Press, 2003), 112-20 and 378-83. Niceta M. Vargas, *Word and Witness: An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013), 101-5 and 278; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John: Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 130-31 and Kulandaisamy, "Γυνη as a Keyword for the Theological Link between Jn 2:2-4; 19:26-27 and Rev 12: 1-6)," *Mar* 77 (2015):85-112, 100-1.

7 For a brief review, see, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 2 vols., *the Anchor Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1970), The first chapter namely, "The First Sign at Cana in Galilee—Changing of Water to Wine (ii 1-11)," 95-111 and chapter 19 namely, "The Passion Narrative: Division Three (Introduction; Episode 1-4), Episode Three: Jesus Gives His Mother to the Beloved Disciple (xix 25-27)," 2:922-27; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1982), chapter 3 namely, "The Beginnings of "Signs": The Miracle at the Marriage—Feast in Cana (2:1-11)," 1:323-40 and section six, The Passion: Journey to the Cross, Crucifixion and Laying in the Tomb (19:16b-42), subtitled "The Woman Beneath the Cross and the Words of Mary and to the Disciple (19:24c-27)," 3:274-82; Peter F. Ellis, *The Genius of John: A composition—Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1984), Sequence 2 "Water replaced by wine at Cana 2:1-12" 40-44 and Sequence 19 "Jesus dies on the cross (19:25-30)," 270-72; Ignace de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus according to John: Text and Spirit* (Middlegreen, Slough: St. Paul Pub., 1989), chapter 6 namely, Golgotha, "the Spiritual Motherhood of Mary," 132-50.

general studies done on Mariology in the New Testament, there seems to be a lack of studies on Johannine Mariology.[8]

## Preliminary Remarks

In the Fourth Gospel, the Mother of Jesus is never referred to by her proper name, Mary. She is referred to only as "the mother of Jesus" (2:1, 3, 4), "his mother" (2:5 and 19:25-26). Jesus never addresses her as "mother" or by her name, but only as "woman" (2:4; 19:26). The fourth evangelist indicates that her main significance in the story has to do with her unique relationship to Jesus (2:1, 19:25-27).

8 For a brief review, see, Francis J. Moloney, Woman in the New Testament (Pasay, Metro Manila: St. Paul Pub., 1984), chapter 3 namely, "Woman! The Mother of Jesus," 128-32; Francis J. Moloney, Woman First among the faithful: A New Testament Study (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), chapter 5 namely, "The Gospel of John," 74-92; Francis J. Moloney, The Gospel of John, titled, "Woman! The Mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," 87-92; Francis J. Moloney, Mary: Woman and Mother, chapter 5 namely, "The Fourth Gospel: Woman and Mother," 31-50; Francis J. Moloney, Belief in the Word, Reading the Fourth Gospel: John 1—4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), chapter four, namely, "Faith in the Word of Jesus at Cana: John 2:1-12," 77-92; Francis J. Moloney, Glory not Dishonor: Reading John 13—21 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), chapter six, namely, "Consummation: John 18:1—19:42," 127-52; Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, Appendix II: Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel, subtitled "The Mother of Jesus," 192-98; Brown et al., Mary in the New Testament chapter 7, namely, "The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John," 179-218; de la Potterie, Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, chapter 5, namely, "The Mystery of the Wedding Feast," 157-207 and chapter 6, namely, "The Spiritual Maternity of Mary," 211-29; Stefano M. Manelli, All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 1995), Part 2, namely, The New Testament, subtitled, "Marriage Feast at Cana," 291-309 and with another subtitled "Behold Your Mother... Behold Your Son," 323-37; Scott Hahn, Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God, chapter 2, namely "Christmas's Eve," 29-46; Haffiner, The Mystery of Mary, chapter 3, namely, "Mary in the Writings of St. John," 64-68; Frakasfalvy, The Marian Mystery, chapter 2, namely, "The Biblical Sources on Mary," 42-46; Buby, Mary in the New Testament, chapter 5, namely, "The Gospel of John and the Mother of Jesus," 109-39; Scott Hans "Biblical Theology and Marian Studies," in Scripture and the Mystery of the Mother of God: Catholic for a Reason II, Ed. Scott Hahn and Leon J. Suprenant, Jr. (Quezon City: Jesuit Communication, 2006), 199-227 and others.

## The *Sitz in Evangelium* of Jn 2:1-11

Chapter 2 of the Gospel of John begins with "on the third day there was a marriage at Cana" (Jn 2:1). John is the only evangelist who speaks about "Cana of Galilee." The name of the village appears three times in the Fourth Gospel (Jn 2:1 and 4:46, and 21:2).[9] The focus of the study in this section is "on the third day." The careful reader of the Gospel realizes that this is not the first time reference after the Prologue (Jn 1:1-18). The first time reference occurs in Jn 1:29 with "on the next day." This means that John's testimony before the Jewish authorities described in vv. 19-28 happens on the first day. On the next day, i.e., on the second day, John points out Jesus to Israel.

On the next day, the third day, John points out Jesus to two of his disciples (1:35). On the next day, the fourth day, Jesus calls Philip, and Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus. Jesus promises that Nathanael will recognize Jesus as the new Temple, Bethel (Gen 28:10-22), the new meeting place of God and humanity (Dan 7:13-14). This is then followed with 2:1 "on the third," which places the marriage at Cana on the seventh day.[10]

Looking at the above findings, the parallelism with the Creation account (Gen 1:1-2:4a) comes to mind immediately.[11]

9 C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 297.

10 Brown, *The Gospel according to John,* I: 97-98; Briger Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and 4:1-42*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 6 (N. C.,: CWK, Greenup, 1974), 25 and James H. Bailey, *The Miracles of Jesus Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 64; Francis Martin, "Mary in the Sacred Scripture: An Ecumenical Reflection," *Tho* 72/4 (2008):525-69, 531, n. 12. 29

11 For a brief survey, see, Joseph A. Grassi, "The Wedding at Cana (Jn. 2: 1-11): A Pentecostal Meditation?" *NovT* 14/2 (1972):131-36, 133; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 97-106; Max Thurian, *Mary, Mother of the Lord, Figure of the Church* (London: Faith Press, 1963),121-23; Mullins, *The Gospel of John*, 86-120 and de la Porterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 167.

God finishes the creation of the world in six days and then rests on the seventh day, the Sabbath. In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist testifies about himself and then points out Jesus to Israel and then leads two of his disciples to Jesus. Jesus invites them to stay with him, and from that time, they become Jesus' disciples. One of the two, Andrew, brings his brother Simon to Jesus. Jesus gives him the name Peter. On the following day, Jesus then calls Philip and Nathanael. In other words, Jesus assembles the community of disciples or the new people of God, and then on the seventh day, it all climaxes in the celebration of a marriage: a new Sabbath.[12]

If this is true, we have in the section of John 1:19-2:11 not only a narration of the new creation modeled in a way on the narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:4a. We have in this section a prophetic presentation of the saving work of Jesus or a summary of the story of the entire Gospel. Bruce Vawter summarizes it well:

> On the third day: in following the chronology (1:29, 35, 41, 43), we must take this to mean the third day (that is, the day after tomorrow) following the call of Philip and Nathanael. Thus, the wedding feast at Cana takes place on the "seventh day" of the new creation story.[13]

There are a number of details in this narrative that seem to support the analysis presented above. First of all, no real wedding is possible on the seventh day, the Sabbath. The reason is simple; the Sabbath observance would prohibit all the things necessary to have a wedding celebration like cooking, serving food, traveling to the place of the wedding, if any distance were involved. Thus, a marriage on the seventh

12 Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 97.

13 Bruce Vawter, *The Gospel according to John*, in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Ronald E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), 59.

day automatically would caution us that something more than the surface meaning is involved here.

Even if one were to ignore the time reference in Jn 1:19-43 and focus only on the time reference in Jn 2:1 "on the third day," and that the Fourth Gospel was written to believers and not to unbelievers, a Christian reader would automatically think of the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.[14] If this were true, it would lead readers to understand the wedding as the result of the saving work of Jesus, an endless celebration of the union of the heavenly bridegroom with his redeemed people.[15]

Besides scholars who have proposed reading Jn 1:19-2:11 as a telling of the story of the new creation in imitation of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, there are others like Moloney, Coloe, Varghese, and Serra[16] who see in Jn 2:1 a reference to Ex 19:10-11, where God orders Moses to consecrate the people on the first and second day. God himself will come down on Mount Sinai and reveal his glory on the third day. For example, consider the words of Mary Coloe, who sees a day of glory or revelation in Jn 2:1. She says:

> This miracle performed "on the third day" (v. 1), alludes to the gift of the Law at Sinai (Exod 19: 16) when God's glory was revealed to Israel (Exod 19: 16

14 Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 56.

15 Joseph Ponessa and Laurie Watson Manhardt, *Come and See: Catholic Bible Study, the Gospel of John* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Pub., 2004), 19.

16 Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 66; Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), 69; Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009), 71, Kindle and Aristide M. Serra, *Maria A Cana La Croce: Saggio di Mariologia Giovannea* (Roma: Centro di Cultura Mariana, 1991), 11-15, http://www.culturamariana.com/pubblicazioni/A%20Cana%20e%20presso%20la%20Croce.pdf (accessed October 22, 2017).

-20; 24: 16-17). The gift of the Law was sealed in the solemn Mosaic covenant (Exod 24: 3 -8), which was frequently described as a marriage between God and Israel (Hos 2: 19-20; Isa 25: 6-8; 62:5; Jer 2:2; 3:14).[17]

## Wine and the Significance of an Abundance of Wine

The marriage feast at Cana revolves around the shortage and abundance of wine.[18] The word "wine" occurs five times in the narrative: twice in v. 3, once in v. 9, and twice in v. 10. To get an idea of the quantity of wine provided by Jesus, one needs to translate the measures of the stone jars into bottles. The six stone jars held between twenty to thirty gallons each, roughly 120 to 180 gallons. Each gallon would give five bottles of wine, making the total between 600 to 900 bottles of wine, truly a huge amount.

This fact recalls the prophetic traditions which describe the Day of Salvation. A look at some references from the Old Testament and Intertestamental literature concerning wine and salvation will shed light on the connection. In the Old Testament, "wine" appears 141 times. In the book of Exodus, wine became a symbol of sealing the covenant on the Mountain Sinai. God called Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, where they all ate and drank in the presence of God (Ex 24:9-11).[19]

17 Coloe, *God Dwells with Us,* 69.

18 Antonio Gracia-Mareno, *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews: A Study of Johannine Christology* (Manila: Studium Theologiae Foundation, 2010), 391.

19 Ryken Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, "Wine," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 953. See also, David Noel Freedman, ed., "Wine," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 1379-80 and Douglas, "Wine and Strong Drink," in *New Bible Dictionary*, 1331-2.

In the prophetic tradition, the chosen people will dine at Mount Zion [20], and the LORD will provide them the finest wine (Is 25:6). The wine provided by the LORD will be sweet (Amos 9:13)[21], and wine will overflow (Jl 2:24). It appears then that the abundance of wine becomes the symbol of the advent of salvation. In this advent of salvation, the people of God will find satisfaction and growth.[22] The prophets Jeremiah and Hosea describe the advent of salvation as satisfaction and growth for the people. Consider the following passages:

> They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again... and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the LORD (Jer 31: 12-14).

> They shall return and dwell beneath the shadow; they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom as the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon (Hos 14: 7)

The image of an abundance of wine as the advent of salvation is also found in the intertestamental texts.[23] For example, Enoch 10:19, a Jewish apocryphal book, indicates that the vine shall yield in abundance. Along the same line, in the ancient Jewish apocalypse known as 2 Baruch 29:3-5,

20 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scroll*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series (Georgia, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 53.

21 John McHugh, "The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11)," in *Mary for Earth and Heaven,* ed. William M. McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominister: Gracewing, 2002), 3-9, 7.

22 Willis Hedley Salier, *The Rhetorical Impact of the Semeia in the Gospel of John* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 66.

23 Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), 59.

the author makes clear that the Messiah will reveal himself through the abundance of wine:

> And it shall come to pass when all is accomplished that was to come to pass in those parts, that the Messiah shall then begin to be revealed… the earth shall also yield its fruit ten thousandfold on each vine there shall be a thousand grapes, and each grape produces a cor of wine.[24]

According to Irenaeus, "every grape when pressed will give five and twenty meters of wine."[25] In other words, each grape will give about 120 gallons of wine.[26] After seeing a few passages in the Old Testament and Intertestamental literature, the action of Jesus finds its echo in the prophetic tradition. The transformation of the water into wine, especially the abundance of wine, indicates the coming of the new age, i.e., the age of salvation.[27]

## Woman[28]

Jesus' address to his mother opens a new perspective and creates a new relationship between Son and mother. In the prophetic writings, the city of Jerusalem is described as a woman (Jer 2:2 and Hos 3:1). In the same prophetic tradition, the city has been referred to as daughter Zion.[29] Furthermore,

24 "2 Baruch: The Book of the Apocalypse of Baruch the Son of Neriah," in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/pseudepigrapha/2Baruch.html (accessed January 10, 2018)

25 Irenaeus, "Against Heresies, book 5, chapter 33:3," *New Advent*, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103533.htm (accessed January 10, 2018).

26 Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1:105.

27 Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 63.

28 The term "woman" occurs in the following verses: Jn. 2:4; 4:7, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27, 28, 39, 42, 8:3, 4, 9, 10; 16: 21; 19: 26; 20:13, 15. For this study, the researcher will only consider the passages where the term woman refers to the Mother of Jesus (Jn 2:1-12; 19: 25-27).

29 Gebara, *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, 79.

the prophets Isaiah and Micah describe Jerusalem as the daughter Zion (Is 62:11 and Mic 4: 13). Even from these few examples, it can be seen that daughter Zion is a synonym for the people of Jerusalem.[30] In addition, daughter Zion here does not refer to a specific person but it has been named or called as a city or, in other words, a personification of the people of God.[31] Thus, Zion represents a city where all the believers are gathered together. Furthermore, Maier sees Zion as a space and as a woman that represents the believers:

> The personified female city offers a portrait of Zion in which spatial and gendered elements are intertwined. In other words, the personification allows one to think of Zion as a space and as a woman that represents the inhabitants of this space. In particular, prophetic visions about Zion's future from the book of Isaiah present the city as a symbol of faith that unites all those who believe in YHWH, the Israelite national deity (Isa 2:1-5; 54: 11-14; 66; 62:2-5; 66: 7-14).[32]

## Do Whatever He Tells You

The address of Jesus to his mother initially seems like a reprimand, but in the context of the narrative (Jn 2:1-11), which focuses on Jesus providing an abundance of wine, a new way of viewing it opens up. This new perspective goes beyond the maternal and familial relationship. As seen in the text, Mary is the first person in the Fourth Gospel who completely understood the words of Jesus. Comprehending the meaning of the words of her Son, Mary orders the servants to "do whatever he tells you." It is not known if Jesus was known by the

30 Anthony J. Tambasco, *What Are They Saying about Mary?*, 32.

31 McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament,* 388-89.

32 Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 2.

servants, but it can be said that Mary introduced Jesus to the servants and the servants to Jesus.

The address of Jesus to his own mother lays the foundation of the new relationship between mother and Son in which blood ties are no longer the most important but only the words of Jesus. She realizes that accepting the words of Jesus and living them out will lead to redemption and life. By following the words of Jesus, the servants lead to an abundance of the best wine at the marriage, just as it will lead to redemption and life.[33] We witness how Mary listens, keeps, and understands the words of Jesus. While speaking to the servants in v. 5, Mary points towards her Son and instructs them to act upon her Son's words. The words of Mary to the servants are her profession of faith.

The words of Mary here are generally considered reminiscent of Genesis (41:55).[34] At first glance, this assessment seems justified. Nevertheless, these two scenes have nothing in common, and their context is totally different.[35] On the other hand, the words of Mary find a link with the Sinai Covenant (Ex 24:3-7).[36] The reply of the Israelites and the words of Mary can be considered as a profession of faith. Moloney also sees in the words of Mary a profession of faith, an expression of "unconditional trust in the word of her Son." As once the *debarim* ("words") of the Law offered life to a people, so now the Mother of Jesus trusts that the *debar* [sic] ("word") of her Son will do likewise."[37]

33 Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1-4* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 82-86.

34 Mullins, *John,* 117-118.

35 da la Potterie, *The Mystery of the Covenant,* 188-89.

36 Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1-4*, 83-84.

37 Ibid., 84.

In this pericope, the Mother of Jesus is the first character in the Gospel of John who fully believes in Jesus. She listens and commits herself to follow her Son. The address of Jesus in calling his mother "woman" also becomes an echo of the prophetic tradition. This address of Jesus indicates the special role of Mary in the work of redemption. She recapitulates the symbolic figure of the woman Zion. She stands as the personification of the woman Zion under the symbolism of a woman.

Through her faith in Jesus, she encourages the servants to do whatever her Son tells them to do. The instructions to the servants show her authentic faith in her Son. Her journey of discipleship begins when she understands the words of Jesus and shows her full trust in them. Her full trust and faith in Jesus can be observed in Jn 19:25-27, where she receives the new mission from Jesus.

## The *Sitz in Evangelium* of Jn 19:25-27

Within the context of the Passion Narrative in Jn 19:16b-42, John tells the story of Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial. The narrative is made up of the following scenes: the crucifixion of Jesus (19:16b-18); the inscription on the cross of Jesus (vv. 19-22); the discussion of the seamless robe (vv. 23-24); Jesus' mother and the Beloved Disciple (vv. 25-27); the death of Jesus and handing over his Spirit (vv. 28-30); breaking of Jesus' legs and opening his side with lance (vv. 31-37), and

the burial of Jesus (vv. 38-42).[38] The pericope is significant because it appears at the center of the Passion Narrative. At the center of the Johannine Crucifixion account, the third of five episodes stand as the gift of mother to Son and Son to mother. Brown has presented a brief summary of the five episodes:

> Episode 1 proclaims to the whole civilized world the kingship of Jesus ... Episode 2 is concerned with the symbolism of the seamless tunic, a priestly garment ... Episode 3 is centered on Jesus' lasting concern for the community of those whom he leaves behind ... *His mother, the symbol of the New Israel*... Episode 4 shows the death of Jesus as the completion of all that the Father had given him to do ... Episode 5 continues the proleptic symbolism of the giving of the Spirit.[39]

In Jn 19:25-27, through the lens of the abundance of wine, one can postulate that this act of Jesus from the cross creates a community of believers. It seems, therefore, that the ultimate purpose of Jesus' mission was to create a community of believers. Although Mary does not do anything nor say anything in the pericope, she becomes the mother of all

38 Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 910-12. There are certain modern exegetes who agree with Brown's structure. See, Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 229; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 89-95 and Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus*, 115. Whereas Rudolf Schnackenburg sees contrast elements among episodes and arrangement as artificial, "Brown, pp. 910-912, divides the section into five episodes, framed within an introduction (vv.16b-18) and a conclusion (vv. 38-42). He arranges these seven units in a descending and ascending line so that they contrast with one another; introduction and conclusion; episode 1 (vv. 19-22) and episode 5 (vv.31-37); episode 2 (vv. 23-24) and episode 4 (vv. 28-30). At the turning-point in the middle stands episode 3 (vv. 25-27). Brown perceives a theological conception in this; but the arrangement seems artificial, the 'correspondence' of the episodes is not convincing. Admittedly, we can also make two units out of vv. 16v-22 (vv. 16b-18; 19-22) and thus obtain seven units," (see, Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 3:455, n. 1.).

39 Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 2:912-13. *Italics* supplied.

those who believe in Jesus and is herself entrusted to them. This view receives support from Feuillet, who also sees in Jn 19:25-27 the ultimate purpose of the messianic work of Jesus. He points to the transitional verse 28, "After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished" and says:

> The evangelist himself, in 19, 28, asks us to see in the scene he just described, the ultimate purpose of the messianic work of Jesus and the supreme manifestation of his salvific love." [40]

It would appear then that v. 28 is not only a transitional verse, but contains a link between Jn 19:25-27 and the scene which follows (vv. 28-30). The link, as shown above, is created by the Johannine expression "after this." It indicates that Jesus has done something which was long waited or was expected. It is also important to notice that Jesus has initiated the "gathering" at the Cross by entrusting his mother to the disciple and the disciple to his mother. Prior to the transitional verse 28, a careful reading of the pericope shows that Jesus addresses his mother and the Beloved Disciple in a way that explicitly calls upon a pattern or formula of revelation which is found in the Gospel of John at least four times (1:21; 1:35-36; 1:47 and 19:25-27). This formula or way of address contains four elements:

- Persons A and B (there may be more)
- A sees B
- On seeing B, A says something about B, which in Greek always begins with *idou* or *ide* (behold)

40 The author's translation. For the original text, see, A. Feuillet, "Les adieux du Christ à sa merè (19: 25-27) et la maternité spirituelle de Marie," *NRTh* 86 (1964):469-89, 474. "L'évangéliste lui-même, en 19, 28, nous demande de voir dans la scène qu'il vient de raconter le sommet de l'oeuvre messianique de Jésus et la manifestation suprême de son amour salvifique."

- This word is followed by a title that declares and reveals something new about B.[41]

One can see the four elements of the revelatory formula in Jn 19:25-27. The following illustrates the description of Jn 19:25-27 as an application of the revelatory formula:

To the Mother of Jesus

- *Jesus* and *Mary*
- When Jesus *saw* his mother
- *Said* to his mother,
- *Behold*, your Son.

To the Beloved Disciple

- Jesus and the Beloved Disciple
- When Jesus *saw* the disciple whom he loved
- *Said* to the disciple
- *Behold*, your mother.[42]

By means of this action, Jesus has revealed the identity of Mary as the mother of the Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Disciple as the Son of Mary.[43] Jesus establishes a new relationship between his mother and disciple.[44] This new relationship reveals a new dimension of the role of Mary, i.e., to be the mother of the beloved disciple, and the beloved disciple becomes the brother of Jesus. Meanwhile, the relationship established between the mother of Jesus and the Beloved

41 de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus*, 139, and Stefano M. Manelli, *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: Biblical Mariology* (New Bedford, Massachusetts: Academy of the Immaculate, 1994), 327.

42 Italics supplied

43 See, de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus*, 144 and Elllis, *The Genius of John*, 271.

44 Moloney, *Mary: Woman and Mother*, 45.

Disciple while standing near the Cross of Jesus is that of mother and son (2:1-11; 19:25).

In the Marriage Feast at Cana, Mary received the water changed into wine. Now, while standing near the Cross of her Son, she receives a disciple changed into her son. In Jn 19:25-27, Jesus is the one who gives a new role to his mother, i.e., the mother of all the believers of Jesus represented by the Beloved Disciple. It seems that the relationship established between Jesus' mother and his disciple is a result of a specific command known as the revelation formula in the Fourth Gospel. In this way, Mary's relationship with the Beloved Disciple is very special because "[she] is not only as another disciple [in the newborn community]. She is not "sister" to the disciple or merely another member of *ta idia*, a new place and new gathering of people. There, she is "mother."[45]

## Conclusion

One can observe that Mary has a particular role in her Son's work of messianic fulfillment. The focus is on her discipleship and motherhood. The new community of believers is born near the Cross and entrusted to the care of Mary, when Jesus tells his mother to accept his disciple as her Son. She becomes as it were the new people of God, the woman Zion. She, together with all her children, follows her Son. She is entrusted to the care of Jesus' faithful brothers represented by the Beloved Disciple.[46]

John designates the Mother of Jesus in four different ways: "the mother of Jesus," twice (2:1 and 3); "his mother," twice

45 Moloney, *Johannine Studies 1975-2017*, 278.

46 Juan Luis Bastero, *Mary, Mother of the Redeemer: A Mariology Text Book*, trans., Michael Adams and Philip Griffin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 148.

(2:5 and 12); "the mother," and "your mother," once (19:27a). Jesus only addresses his mother as "woman," twice in 2:4a and 19:26b. One can draw the following conclusion for Johannine Mariology based on the above findings:

## The Woman

The prophet had spoken about the woman Zion who gives birth to the people of God (Is 66:7-8).[47] The people of God who come from her womb will participate in the new age.[48] By addressing his own mother as "woman," Jesus indicates the symbolic functions and representative role of Mary.[49] Thus, the presence of the mother of Jesus at crucial moments in the life of Jesus marks the birth of a new life in Jesus.[50]

## A Representative of Faithful Israel

Mary has a representative role in the Fourth Gospel. She represents the people who faithfully await the messianic times. In the Wedding Feast at Cana (2:1-11), she gave voice to the longing of Israel for the messianic gift that God has promised would come on the day of deliverance: "They have no wine" (2:3).

## The First Believer of Jesus

In the "Wedding at Cana" (2:1-4:54), Mary is the only person who fully understands the words of Jesus. She believed in her Son prior to any signs being worked. The indication of the shortage of wine finds its meaning in the faith response of Mary. Without any hesitation and with faith, she

47 Brown, *John*, 2:926.

48 Sean P. Kealy, *That You May Believe* (Middlegreen, Slough: St. Paul Pub., 1978), 150.

49 Minear, *John: The Martyr's Gospel*, 45.

50 Brown, Raymond, E *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 12.

turned towards the servants and said, "Do whatever he tells you (2:5)." Her instruction to the servants is a visible sign of her faith in her Son. This action of Mary makes her the first believer in the Fourth Gospel.

## The True Disciple

In the Fourth Gospel, a true disciple of Jesus is the one who continues to hear the words of Jesus: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciple" (8:31b). Mary hears the words of her Son and invites others to listen and obey her Son (2:5). She becomes the first person in the Fourth Gospel who fully hears and understands the words of Jesus. She fits the criteria of discipleship designated by Jesus her Son.[51]

## The Mother of the New Faithful Community

Through his last messianic act from the Cross, Jesus creates a new family of believers. Furthermore, he created a new relationship between his Mother and the Beloved Disciple. This action of Jesus highlights the role of Mary, who is given a mission to be the Mother of the believers. Mary continues her loving concern towards the community of believers as her own children.

51 John Shiela Galligan, "Mary: A Mosaic of Joy," *Review for Religious* 43 (Jan. Feb., 1984):83-91, 88.

# Repent and Believe in the Gospel:
## *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* in the Ash Wednesday Liturgy

*Anthony John Javier, SSP*

### Introduction

In the Catholic Church, we have a very old maxim: "...*Lex orandi, lex credendi*." Literally translated, it means, "the law of prayer is the law of belief." Coined by *Prosper of Aquitaine*, this axiom has become one of the tenets of liturgical theology and expresses how the liturgy of the Catholic Church is very coherent with its words and actions and consistent with its teachings and decrees.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that liturgy is a "privileged place" for catechesis (CCC 1074). Therefore, the goal of liturgy is to lead the faithful in understanding the core faith values behind the words and gestures within the liturgy: its theology and spirituality. Consequently, in achieving this goal, the faithful are then edified to live 'in Christ' and perfect charity. Indeed, prayer and worship are the articulation of our faith. Meaning to say, we pray and live what we believe, just as the complete version of the maxim quoted above tells us, "*Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*." We pray, so we believe, so we live.

In this regard, we can say that the words used in the liturgy are precisely knitted to have a cohesive relationship between the prayers and actions, the form and matter in the liturgy. Every word and every action in the liturgy have a

corresponding meaning and purpose. The Church's teachings (*lex credendi*) are articulated and made manifest in the celebration of the liturgy through prayers and rites (*lex orandi*).[1] In praying, we are also being taught and in learning these, we are compelled to live what we learned and what we believe.

This paper explores the imposition of ashes in the Ash Wednesday liturgy and reflects on its meaning for our faith. Aside from exploring the ritual gesture itself, it will also analyze the accompanying formula and the theology it contains.

## Biblical Roots of Imposition of Ashes during Ash Wednesday

The use of ashes has already been present since the Old Testament times. In the Bible, ashes symbolize mourning, repentance, mortality, and penance.

### Ashes of Mourning

In the Book of Esther, ashes were used by Mordecai to signify that he was mourning upon hearing the decree of Haman of Persia, mandating the murder of all of the Jewish people in his empire. "*When Mordecai learned all that was happening, he tore his garments, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city crying out loudly and bitterly.*"[2] Later on, in the same account, all the Jews "*went into deep mourning, with fasting, weeping, and lament; most of them lay on sackcloth and ashes.*"[3] The same explanation is seen in the Book of Judith from which we can also identify a biblical basis for the custom of placing ashes on the head as a symbol

1 *See* Kevin Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994).

2 Esther 4:1 (New American Bible Revised Edition)

3 Esther 4:3 (NAB Revised Edition)

of mourning.[4] In the Book of Daniel, ashes were also used to signify the same intention. When Daniel read the prophecy of Jeremiah that for seventy years Jerusalem should lie in ruins, he prayed to the Lord "*with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes*.[5]

In the biblical narratives cited above, we can infer that the gesture of the imposition of the ashes on the head or all over the body is also a metaphor for "humiliating oneself,"[6] a very crucial characteristic of repenting. This disposition is an expression of a strong sense that one has done wrong. In the texts presented, the use of ashes is to humble oneself before the eyes of God, that God may have mercy on them, save them from their misery, and forgive them from all their sins.

## Ashes of Repentance

In the book of Job, written between the 7th and 5th century B.C., the gesture of covering the body with ashes symbolizes a repentant heart. In the part of the narrative where Job surrenders himself to God's will and humbles himself before God, he says, "*I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes.*"[7] In the same way, the prophet Jonah who preached repentance and conversion of heart to the town of Nineveh, encouraged the entire town and the king to cover themselves with ashes and sit in ashes to please God to spare them with mercy and not carry out his divine wrath to the town. "*The people of Nineveh believed in God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. [And] when the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his*

4 Judith 9:1 (NAB Revised Edition)

5 Daniel 9:3 (New International Version)

6 Jastrow, Morris, "Dust, Earth, and Ashes as Symbols of Mourning among the Ancient Hebrews." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 20 (1899): 135. doi:10.2307/592320 (Accessed March 30, 2021).

7 Job 42:6 (NAB Revised Edition).

*throne, laid his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes*."[8]

The representation of ashes, as understood above, strongly suggests that the use of ashes was once connected with the idea of purification and that the placing of ashes on the head has an expiatory significance.[9]

## Ashes of Mortality

There are few references, indeed, in the Bible where we can identify that ashes were used to symbolize mortality. However, it was already a common understanding in the Bible that man, after his death, will succumb to ashes. As stated in the Book of Genesis, man was *formed out of clay.*[10] Other translations of this text use *dirt, ground, or dust* which relatively also means ashes. Without life, man returns to ashes (Genesis 2:7), "*by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust, you shall return*."[11]

This is what most scholars believed to be the meaning of the obscure gesture of Job in "sprinkling the ashes into the air over their heads."[12] The gesture symbolizes mortality. Some scholars explained that the said gesture, metaphorically and symbolically, reenacts burial rituals where 'the earth would be thrown over the dead body or into the grave.'[13]

8 Jonah 3:5-6 (NAB Revised Edition).
9 Jastrow, "Dust, Earth, and Ashes."
10 Genesis 2:7 (NAB Revised Edition).
11 Genesis 3:19 (NAB Revised Edition).
12 Job 2:12 (NAN Revised Edition).
13 Jastrow, "Dust, Earth, and Ashes."

## Ashes of Penance

Penance and Repentance are closely related to each other. Penance, by definition, is an act done personally as an expression of apology, regret, and guilt brought about by sin. Hence, penance is an expression of repentance. Even Jesus made some reference to ashes as an act of penance. In the New Testament, Jesus said that if the mighty works he had performed among his contemporaries were performed in the pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon, the pagans would have long shown reparation, "*... in sackcloth and ashes*." [14]

Therefore it also goes without saying that penance is present in all gestures of remorse, mourning, and repentance. Consequently, penance constitutes a change of heart. The use of ashes in the bible and the liturgy signifies one's admittance of sin and reliance on the mercy of God.

## Ashes: Signs of Death and Life, Sorrow and Joy

Following this line of thinking allows us to understand some truths about our faith and life as mere human beings. In the same manner, we are led to other realizations on how to live our lives as a person, as a human being, and as a Christian. The ashes which we use in the liturgy during Ash Wednesday tell us our own story, the story of the relationship of God and his people.

Recently, in this time of the pandemic, where millions of lives have already been taken by CoViD-19, I saw a post on my personal social media account. In that post, my friend, who recently lost a relative to CoViD-19, asked God: "*Many good people are dying, and many young people are gone too soon. Is this the will of God for them?*" It is even more striking and grieving when read in its original Filipino rendition,

14 Matthew 11:21 (NAB Revised Edition).

*"Maraming mababuting tao na ang kinuha, maraming na ring bata ang tinanggalan ng pagkakataong mabuhay ng matagumpay at masaya… Ito ba ang gusto ng Panginoon para sa kanila?"*

This post honestly hit me too hard that I, too, began to ask the same question. But, upon reflecting on it, I realize that what made the statement negative is my mindset. God never wishes us death. He, rather, desires to be with us. And so, I replied to my friend's post. *"God does not desire death, he desires eternal life for us. Your relative may not be with us anymore, but I am sure that God is holding him ever in the palm of his hand. What we can do now is to live on for that loved one we have lost, that we may share the eternal life he first received, in God's time."* Thinking about it more deeply, this is also the message of the ashes which we impose on our heads during the Ash Wednesday liturgy. The simultaneously 'disturbing and consoling communal action'[15] during the rite frightens us because of the idea of the inevitability of death but, at the same time, consoles us with the idea of eternal life.

The ashes in the Ash Wednesday liturgy remind us that our lives were only given to us and that God is our ultimate end and destiny. It is indeed consoling that the adversities of this passing world will come to an end and, through the mercy of God, we will get to share God's divine life, having to live without the agony of pain, hardship, and sin.

And so, in the same way, we are also reminded that our call in this earthly life is to turn away from sin and to believe in the Good News of our salvation in Jesus. Truly, the imposition of ashes on our forehead is a joyful reminder of our purpose as Christians and as God's created beings.

15 Martin Connell, *Ash Wednesday: Meaning and History. In Journal of the Liturgical Conference,* vol. 15, no. 1. Taylor & Francis Group, 1998. 9

## The Formula for the Imposition of Ashes

In the Liturgy of the Ash Wednesday, two alternative formulas are provided for the imposition of the ashes: "***Remember that you are dust, and to dust, you shall return"*** and ***"Repent, and believe in the Gospel."***

**From dust and unto dust, you shall return.** With reference to the book of Genesis, we can understand the natural design of human life, '*By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust, you will return."* The Liturgy reminds us that our last day is coming and that our bodies will, sooner or later, return to the dust of the earth for a time after death.[16] In the same way, this formula reminds us that there is nothing we can boast of to ourselves, to others, and especially to God. Thus, what is asked of us is to live a life of humility with compassion for others that we may have eternal life and share the eternal banquet of God.

This idea is supported by the prayer which the presiding priest utters during the blessing of the ashes, before the imposition:

> O God, who are moved by acts of humility and respond with forgiveness to works of penance, lend your merciful ear to our prayers and in your kindness pour out the grace of your blessing on your servants who are marked with these ashes, that as they follow the Lenten observance they may be worthy to come with minds made pure to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of your Son through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Repent and believe in the Gospel.** Just as in the old times, ashes are used to signify repentance. 'This formula

16 Martin Connell, *Ash Wednesday: Meaning and History*. 9

emphasizes our penance, our fasting, that this gains favor with God.'[17] It is notable that in this formula, there is no mention of dust which pertains to the frailty of human nature. There is also no mention of the implication of death. Instead, the word used is "repentance" or the admittance that we are mere creatures bound to die and ever at the mercy of God. Repentance is the admittance that we sin and should ask for forgiveness from the merciful and compassionate Father. Above all, repentance is the way to salvation. Repentance is *metanoia*, a change of heart.

This idea is also supported by the prayer which the presiding priest utters during the blessing of the ashes before its imposition. Thus, ***lex orandi, lex credendi***.

> O God who desire not the death of sinners, but their conversion, mercifully hear our prayers and in your kindness be pleased to bless these ashes, which we intend to receive upon our heads, that we, who acknowledge we are but ashes and shall return to dust, may, through a steadfast observance of lent, gain pardon for sins and newness of life after the likeness of your Risen Son. Who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

## Conclusion

So many times, we have heard the phrase, 'action speaks louder than words.' This is true on so many levels, especially when we speak of how our actions should cohere with the words that come out from our lips. The same with 'practice what you preach.' Human as we are, we reject the inconsistent and tend to admire the consistent; in politics, in society, in

17 Kevin M. Tierney and Jacob Michael, "The Disciple of Lent: A Comparison of the Proper of the Traditional Latin Mass and the *Novus Ordo*," In *Daily Catholic,* vol 15, no. 67, 4. http://dailycatholic.org/issue/04Mar/mar7lex.htm.

morals, and in the liturgy. Oftentimes coherence is where beauty and truth reside.

This is probably one of the reasons why the Liturgy of the Church is so consistent because the Church is cognizant that its rituals, practices, sacraments, liturgy have to be pleasing to the eyes, edifying to the heart, and appealing to the mind. In this way, the truth of the Gospel would be efficiently handed on from one generation to another: systematically, thoroughly, and consistently.

In the Ash Wednesday liturgy, both the rites and prayers consistently remind us to be mindful of our mortal nature and return to God, especially in the season of Lent. In a sense, they remind us to be consistent ourselves so that our lives become coherent with our worship.

# BACCALAUREATE IN SACRED THEOLOGY

# SYNTHESIS PAPERS

# *Divine Flesh*:
## The Interplay Between Human and Divine in the Double Movement of Deification of Humanity and Humanization of Divinity

*Cesare Sposetti, SJ*

### Introduction

When I was still studying in high school, I had the opportunity to read a famous contemporary Italian novel, *Sostiene Pereira*, written by Antonio Tabucchi.[1] The main character, Mr. Pereira, a journalist living in Portugal during the dictatorship of Antonio Salazar, in the 1930s, is an obese middle-aged man with many obsessions. One of them, being a Catholic, is his obsessive doubt about the resurrection of the flesh. Mr. Pereira is asking himself: "How and why should this fat and flabby body resurrect?" What good can there be in it? As a teen, I was already struck by that argument. Also, having a "bad relationship" with my own body (for different reasons, though), I was asking myself how God could really love our human flesh, or, more widely put, our very humanity,[2] and make something good of it.

1 Antonio Tabucchi, *Sostiene Pereira* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1994).

2 In this paper I will consider the term "flesh," בָּשָׂר in Hebrew, σάρξ in Greek, in accordance with the Jewish tradition: "The human can only be understood as a psychosomatic unity. When the Bible speaks of 'flesh' it presupposes that very unity." See Gerhard Lohfink, *Is All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 175. So, though this term has been often used to signify "human vulnerability, weakness and mortality" (cf. Ibid., 173. See for instance the Pauline use of the term), in a biblical perspective it is also representative of our own whole humanity, in which the "fleshy" and the spiritual components can never be separated. I am obviously aware that the term "humanity" is wider than its mere "carnal" expression.

Contemplating God assuming human flesh, and human nature becoming part of the very life of the Trinity with the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, has constantly accompanied me during the entire span of my theological studies. But, as I showed, it has already been present ever since I started to question myself about God and His action in my life and in the world. My personal spiritual journey brought me from an idea of God as abstract and distant to the contemplation of the human life of His incarnated Son. This movement was further facilitated by my experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. More and more, I came to realize that we are loved and saved by God not "in spite of" our flesh, but "in and through" our flesh. God Himself *forever* took a body. In doing so, He made clear that human and Divine, though distinct, can never be separated. Human and Divine always live and work together. As Karl Rahner wonderfully put it, all theology is eternally (also) anthropology.[3] Our very flesh, as Tertullian said in a famous and much-quoted sentence, is the "hinge" of our Salvation: *Caro Salutis Cardo*.[4]

Christianity has been defined as "the religion of Incarnation."[5] For the most part, the Incarnation itself may be seen as a *fil rouge* that accompanies and links together many principles and aspects of Christian theological reflection. Given the clear limitations of this synthesis paper, I will focus

3 Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 225.

4 Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, VIII, 2, quoted in Paolo Duarte, "Corpo e Carne. Fondamenti patristici in Ireneo e Tertulliano", *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4037 (2018): 367-379.

5 According to the definition given in Margaret R. Miles, *The Word Made Flesh. A History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 1. See also Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 197: "The statement of God's Incarnation – of God's becoming material – is the most basic statement of Christology."

only on a few points: first, the deep meaning of the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ and the permanence of a glorified human nature in Him after the Resurrection; second, how human and Divine come together in the transmission of Divine Revelation itself; third, how the Body of Christ, the Church, also lives and develops through her human and Divine elements; fourth, how in the sacramental dimension our very humanity (our flesh) becomes the *locus* of our experience of the Divine. I will then give my final remarks in a short concluding section.

## Jesus Christ "Truly Man and Truly God" Deification of the Humanity, "Humanization" of the Divinity

As we have seen in our studies of Christology, the "ontological questions" concerning the identity of Jesus appeared at a later stage, when Christianity became more clearly in touch with the Greek and pagan world. The issue of the relationship between the two "natures" of Christ, human and Divine, came out after the early Councils (especially Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople I in 381) clarified the divinity of His "Person." After Jesus Christ was clearly defined as a Divine "Who," especially against the Arian claims, the issue was how divinity and humanity could be present together in this same (Divine) Person. As we know, the Council of Chalcedon (451) struck that balance. This Council accepted the synthesis suggested by Pope Leo I in his letter to Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople: "The one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusions or change, without division or separation."[6] The same Council defined Jesus as "the same

6 ND 615.

perfect in Divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body, the same one in being with the Father as to the Divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity, like unto us in all things but sin."[7] As we can see in this last statement, Chalcedon made even clearer that Jesus Christ is not only ὁμοούσιος with the Father, as already emphasized by Nicaea and Constantinople I, but that He is also ὁμοούσιος with the humanity, *with us*. If the modality of this "hypostatic union" remains basically a mystery, we can say, with Gerald O'Collins, that "in addition to the characteristics of Divinity that He already possessed from eternity, the Word of God acquired [...] all the essential characteristics of a human being. That made Him, and continues to make Him, a genuine human being. His loving 'descent' from heaven 'altered' him by adding the human nature through which He could operate visibly."[8] In spite of the "infinite qualitative difference between the uncreated Divine nature and the created human nature," that cannot be treated "as if they were two of the same kind or two more or less equal species of the same genus,"[9] I feel how it is important as well not to downplay the aforementioned "alteration" that the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, "experienced" from the moment of the Incarnation onwards. As Romano Guardini put it, a "piece of Creation is assimilated into the eternity of God's existence."[10]

In our studies of soteriology, we met the important concept of "deification," or θέωσις, which has been particularly developed in the Eastern theological reflection. As St. Athanasius put it, "[The Word of God], indeed assumed

7 ND 614.

8 Gerald O' Collins, *Incarnation* (London: Continuum, 2002), 66.

9 Ibid., 69.

10 Cf. Romano Guardini, *The Lord* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), 412-413.

humanity that we might become God,"[11] or, as St. Irenaeus said in the terms of the *admirabile commercium*: "In his immense love He became what we are, that He might make us what He is."[12]

It is important for us, though, to keep noticing and affirming also the other correlated movement, that of the "humanization" of God Himself, experienced with the Incarnation, which does not cease even after the Resurrection. As we see in the Resurrection narratives in the Gospels, the Risen One preserves His human nature, though in a transfigured and glorified body, remaining for all the eternity the necessary and permanent Mediator of all Salvation.[13] If it is so, we can say that with the Incarnation, something human has forever entered the very heart of the Trinity. If Incarnation happened "for us men and for our Salvation,"[14] even more it is striking the Love of a God who takes forever into His very being, as it were, the flesh of our humanity.

## The Interplay of Human and Divine in the Transmission of Revelation

We have observed the particular interplay of human and Divine in the hypostatic union in the Person of Jesus Christ, which effectively acts for our redemption and "deification," by the indwelling of the Divinity in the humanity, and by

11 St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, § 54, quoted in Andrew Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," Michael J. Christiansen and Jeffrey A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 34.

12 St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 5 praef., quoted in Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," 34.

13 Cf. Karl Rahner, "The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Jesus for Our Relationship with God," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 43-44.

14 ND 7 (Symbol of Nicaea) and ND 12 (Symbol of Constantinople).

assuming the humanity into the Divinity. We can see the same dynamic *in actu* also in the transmission of the Revelation itself.

The Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II *Dei Verbum* states: "[...] the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the Eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like man."[15] The same passage speaks in terms of a marvelous "condescension." As we can see, we find here a parallelism between the movement of the Incarnation of the Divine Word and the transmission of Divine Revelation through Sacred Scripture. As we find in another passage of *Dei Verbum*, "In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him, they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted."[16] For this reason, as the same passage states, these writings have to be considered as written "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" and they have "God as their author." Further on, it is said also that "God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion."[17] Without going into the details of the different theories of inspiration of the Sacred Scripture, what we find here is a deeply interwoven human and Divine action, which forces us to use a sort of "paradoxical" (but not contradictory)[18] language: human beings are true authors, and God is the true Author of Scripture. If we follow the so-called

15 Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 13.

16 Ibid., 11.

17 Ibid., 12.

18 "The Incarnation is a paradox, but not a blatant logical contradiction." Cf. Gerald O'Collins, "The Incarnation: The Critical Issues," Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O'Collins (eds.), *The Incarnation. An interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

"social inspiration" theories, we see how inspiration is a charism involving not just single individuals, but an entire community, even in an extended time span.[19]

If this can be said about Sacred Scripture, a similar interplay can be observed also for the other and interrelated channel of transmission of Revelation, Tradition. According to *Dei Verbum*, while "Sacred Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit," Sacred Tradition "takes the Word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this Word of God faithfully, explain it and make it more widely known."[20] While Sacred Scripture in its written form is now fixed in a Canon, Tradition (which includes also the living interpretation of Sacred Scripture) remains "alive," and through it "God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son."[21] Consequently, in the process of handing on of Tradition, there is an ongoing "dialogue" between God and His Church, which is constantly operating also through the *sensus fidei*.[22] In this dialogue, like in the process of inspiration of the Sacred Scripture, human and Divine are both called into play, and the Holy Spirit assists the

19 This is for instance the opinion of R. A. F. Mackenzie and J. L. Mackenzie, basing also on Rahner's insights. Cf. Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology: An Introduction to its Sources, Principles and History* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 128: "It is the community which was inspired, and the inspiration of individuals consists in greater or lesser intensities of participation in the corporate charism of inspiration."

20 Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 9.

21 Ibid., 8.

22 Defined as that "supernatural instinct intrinsically linked to the gift of Faith [...] which enables Christians to fulfil their prophetic calling, that is, to recognize and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and to reject what is false." See International Theological Commission, Sensus Fidei *in the Life of the Church* (2014), 2.

Teaching Office of the Church not only in "listening devoutly, guarding scrupulously and explain carefully" the *depositum fidei*,[23] but also in prudently discerning and accompanying "Spirit-leaded" developments of doctrine, facilitated by the aforementioned *sensus fidei*, as we can clearly see in the history of doctrines and of the Church itself.

## The Church, Hierarchical Structure and Mystical Body

The Church has been defined as the "Body of Christ," and, similarly to her Head, she lives and grows through her human and Divine components. The dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II states that "the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities [...]; rather, they form one complex reality which coalesces from a Divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word."[24] As we have seen talking also about Tradition, our "pilgrim Church,"[25] rather than being a static *societas perfecta*, keeps dynamically to move and to walk towards her eschatological fulfillment. As we have already noted, the developments in the interpretation of Scriptures, the developments of doctrines, and even of the theology and of the practice of the Sacraments show a dynamic of growth, in a constant dialogue between the human and institutional component of the Church and her being a "mystery,"[26] the mystical Body of Christ. This deep interplay of humanity and divinity is emphasized also where

23 Cf. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 10.

24 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 8, which quotes especially Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943).

25 Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 48.

26 "The Mystery of the Church" is the title of the first chapter of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*.

it is said that the Church "already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect."[27] If we consider ourselves as part of the Body of Christ that is the Church, we see how we are ourselves part of this history of holiness and imperfection, of completeness and incompleteness, of a humanity which is "on the way" of its deification, and of a Divinity which is not afraid to "mingle" with the flesh of our own limitations and shortcomings. Even more, as we have seen above, we are dealing with a Triune God who has forever assumed our (glorified) humanity, our flesh, in His own very Being.

From this awareness, we see how the presence and the action of the human and Divine components, though always clearly distinct, as Chalcedon teaches us,[28] can never be separated, even in our Church. Another powerful image that has been used to convey the same idea is that of the Church as "universal sacrament of Salvation,"[29] and as fundamental sacrament of Christ Himself. If Christ has been regarded as the "primordial Sacrament of God,"[30] "the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."[31] This last consideration opens us to the final passage of this paper, which is related to the sacramental dynamic at work in this interplay between human and Divine.

27 Ibid., 48.

28 Cf. again ND 615.

29 Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 48.

30 According to the expression used by Edward Schillebeeckx, quoted in Thomas P. Rausch, *Systematic Theology. A Roman Catholic Approach* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation Inc., 2018), 219.

31 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

## The Sacramental Dynamic as Place of Encounter Between a Humanity on the Way of Deification and a "Humanized" God

The continuous dialogue, communication, and interpenetration between human and Divine are clearly manifested in the liturgical action, in which "the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of those signs."[32] If a common definition of "Sacrament" is related to its being a visible sign signifying and conveying an invisible Grace, we can see again how in the sacramental reality human and Divine are deeply bound and interrelated. In the Sacraments, Grace adapts itself *ad modum recipientis*, becomes accessible through our very human senses. Paraphrasing again Tertullian, our flesh, by means of speaking, of listening, of tasting the Body and Blood of Christ, of laying hands, of being immersed in water, of being anointed with sacred oils, etc., becomes the *locus* of the Divine self-communication.[33] This is true for the seven Sacraments, and also for the sacramental reality and dynamic in general, as we have seen in the definition of Jesus Christ Himself as the Sacrament of God, and of the Church as the Sacrament of Christ and of our Salvation. The double movement of the sacramental dynamic, given by the moment of signification and the moment of being "cause" of Grace,[34] is deeply rooted in the Incarnation of the Eternal Word of God. If the Word would not have assumed for the eternity our human nature, our flesh, we would not be able to experience

32 Vatican II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

33 Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 87, talking about "the transcendental self-communication of God which is already intrinsic to the concrete world." Or, said in other words, "God in his own most proper reality makes Himself the innermost constitutive element of man." See Ibid., 116.

34 Cf. Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 215.

in the very depth of our being the fullness of His presence and of His salvific action. The Incarnation, as the basis of the sacramental dimension, allows us to have an authentic experience of God in a *human* way. The special presence of Christ in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, "fount and apex of the whole Christian life,"[35] and particularly in the Eucharistic Species (though not exclusively in them),[36] shows us even more clearly the desire of God to be known and experienced through our own very sensorial and "carnal" experience, and how "glorification of God" and "sanctification of men"[37] are two dimensions always interrelated and inseparable in Christian worship and life.

## Conclusion

Tertullian's treatise *De Carne Christi* passionately and vibrantly defended the reality of Christ's flesh against those, like Marcion and his disciples, who denied it. Tertullian realized that to deny Christ's coming in the flesh equals to deny His real humanity. Our humanity and our flesh are created as good. They are mysteriously part of God's "image and likeness" (Gn 1:26), though tainted by the original sin, and they have really been assumed by God Himself, at the point of becoming, as Tertullian says, the "hinge" of our Salvation.[38]

Moving from the consideration of the hypostatic union of Divine and human nature in Christ, this paper has attempted to analyze how these two dimensions always work and walk together, taking as main examples the two channels of

35 Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

36 Cf. Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

37 Cf. Ibid., 10.

38 Cf. Duarte, "Corpo e Carne. Fondamenti patristici in Ireneo e Tertulliano," 371.

transmission of the Revelation, the two dimensions of the Church as the Body of Christ, and finally the sacramental dynamic. Our human nature, our flesh, has been assumed by the Incarnated Word of God, and has been transfigured and glorified in His Resurrection. Though still dogmatically professing God "unchangeable and unchanging," in the Incarnation, we see that actually God can "become" something.[39] Human nature, a glorified flesh, enters through the Incarnated Word of God, in some mysterious way, even the inner life and being of the Trinity.

Why is that so? Without understating the mystery involved, we can say with Tertullian that "evidently God loves human beings:" "Along with man, He loved also his nativity, and his flesh besides: nothing can be loved apart from that by which it is what it is."[40] "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (Jn 3:16a). This loving κένωσις,[41] this Divine συμπάθεια,[42] assuming our human flesh, opens to the "deification" of humanity, through Its own "humanization." If that is so, our humanity can become the most wondrous epiphany of the depths of the Divine Love, in our own glorified bodies in the final Resurrection that is to come, but also and even in our imperfect and flawed flesh of this life.

39 Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 219-220: "He who is not subject to change in Himself can *Himself* be subject to change *in something else*." The Italics are in the text.

40 Tertullian, *Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1956), 15.

41 Cf. Phil 2:6-11.

42 Cf. Heb 4:15.

# 500 Years of Catholic Faith in the Philippines:

## Today and Onward

*Eugene G. Parayaoan*

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No matter how the pandemic interrupted our daily lives and activities, it does not stop the Philippine Church from celebrating five hundred years since our first encounter with the Christian faith. Surrounding circumstances and motivations for the introduction of the faith may not be as genuine as expected, nonetheless Catholicism greatly affected our history. The fact that the country remains predominantly Catholic attests to this. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) best describes the effect of Catholicism in the country:

> Stormy seas and straits divided one island from another. Different cultures and dialects divided the early Filipinos… It was then the vital task of the First Evangelization to give our people unity… accomplished through one Faith… through one Body.[1]

Current circumstances may have dulled the celebratory mood, but these fortuitous circumstances provide an opportunity to reflect on how we, as a local Church, have lived out the gift of Catholic faith. As early as PCP-II, the Philippine Church had to answer: "Has that faith, does that

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1 PCP II, "Message of the Council," *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*.

faith, make any difference in our life, in our nation? (PCP-II, 2)" After three decades, we ask: how has our faith as Catholics been? A broad question maybe, but it begs to be answered.

Yes, we are undoubtedly a religious people,[2] but what is our basis that we are also a people of faith? I came up with these three criteria based on theological learnings: Familiarity with God, perception toward the Church and the Sacraments, and Christian witnessing. The first, better expressed in Filipino as *pagkakilala sa Diyos,* gauges not only knowledge of God but also our personal relationship with Him. This personal relationship with the Trinitarian God enables us to become our full selves (CFC 63) and understand better the central mystery of the Church, the Trinity (CCC 234). The second, *pakikibahagi sa Simbahan*, examines how we perceive our Catholic identity and mission. The last of the three, *pakikitungo sa kapwa*, gauges how we lived our lives in the service of our neighbor (LG 40), and to our common home. After these, I would address the question that naturally follows: *Quo vadis*? Since our faith as Filipino Catholics is not just a decision but a life commitment, our faith must grow[3] and bear fruit in our lives.

## *Pagkakilala sa Diyos*

It is no secret that Philippine Catholicism is deeply focused on the life and person of Jesus Christ. The two largest devotions in the country honor the Child Jesus (*Santo Niño de Cebu, Manila*), and the suffering Christ (Quiapo's *Itim na Nazareno*). *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* ascribes our fondness for the *Santo Niño* to our fondness for children (CFC 35). A scholar posits that the devotion to the Child

2 Teodoro Bacani, Jr. *Faith and New Evangelization*, (Manila: Gift of God Publications, 2013).

3 Ibid.

Jesus merged pre-Christian and Christian beliefs, as evident during the Sinulog.[4] The wide acceptance of the child Jesus is undeniable; He's in houses, restaurants, and even jeepneys, even donning various uniforms.[5] The devotion to the Child Jesus is a tacit assent that "Jesus has united Himself with every man (GS 22)" "… that he, made man, might make men gods (CCC 460)". This belief is founded on the mystery of Incarnation, the Word of God becoming flesh (Jn 1:14) to be in solidarity with us. Jesus embodies God's gratuitous desire to reveal Himself and to save humanity (DV 2). The incarnate Jesus makes real God's desire to be God-with-us (Mt 1:23), and elevate us to partake in the Divine nature (2 Pt 1:4).

Devotion to the Black Nazarene is equally fervent that even COVID 19 could not deter hundreds of thousands of devotees from attending.[6] Nonbelievers would easily condemn such actions as reckless or even uncritical devotion.[7] However, the devotees' raw faith highlights their familiarity with God, confident that Jesus hears their pleas for deliverance and relief. In His public ministry, Jesus' words and deeds revealed that the Kingdom of God is in our midst to free us from earthly evils (CCC 548). He expelled demons (Mk 9:14-29), cured the sick (Mk 2:1-12), forgave sinners, (Jn 8:1-11), and even called some to be his disciples (Mt 9:9-13). Jesus became their hope and becomes our hope as well. The dark-skinned

4 Michael Chua, "Why Filipinos Love the Santo Nino," *National Quincentennial Committee of the Philippines,* https://nqc.gov.ph/en/resources/why-filipinos-love-the-santo-nino (accessed on 14 January 2021).

5 Ibid.

6 Lois Calderon, Tristan Nodalo and Greg Cahiles, "Hundreds of thousands of Black Nazarene devotees flock to Quiapo Church," CNN Philippines, https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/1/9/Black-Nazarene-feast-2021.html (accessed on 14 January 2021).

7 Daniel Pilario, "Praying Bodies, Dying Bodies: Reflection on the Nazareno and Santo Niño," *Philippine Sociological Review* (2017) Vol. 65.

Christ burdened with the cross strikes a chord in our hearts because we see God experiencing our poverty and suffering (CFC 553), assuring us that God understands our weaknesses and fears (CFC 40). Furthermore, the image of the Nazareno is a reminder that by Jesus' wounds, we are healed (Is 53:4-5). His suffering and death alone did not save us, but it was His perfect, self-giving love (CFC 558) granting us redemption and forgiveness.

However, the image of the *Nazareno* may transmit the message of docility in the face of injustice and oppression or even glorify suffering. God wants us to be free from these! Good Friday, not the whole Paschal Mystery. Through His redeeming sacrifice, Jesus inspires and shows us that we can overcome our tendencies to be self-centered and sinful. Jesus loved us even until His death on the cross, so through His obedience, we may be made righteous (Rom 5:19). The story ends not with the suffering *Nazareno* but with the risen Christ. This is our hope too. Because Christ became one like us, we too shall experience resurrection and vindication (Rom 6:5), not as slaves but as fellow heirs (Gal 4:6), sons and daughters of the Father.

Unfortunately, in contrast to our extensive familiarity and faith in Jesus, there is a gaping lack of intimacy with the Father and the Holy Spirit, or even an understanding of the Trinity for that matter. Aren't we Catholics baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (CCC 233)? Don't we invoke the Trinity in the Sign of the Cross, the Creed, and other prayers? Our Catholic faith is based on and marked by the Trinity (CFC 268)! But alas, most Filipinos are not that familiar with the Trinity, only acquainted and brought up only in scholarly discussion.

Most Filipino fathers are silent providers, conditioned to be inexpressive and 'masculine'. Worse, some are abusive or even absent fathers. These untoward experiences cause resistance in using "Abba, Father! (Gal 4:6)" But as early as the Old Testament, God revealed Himself as a Father, "the first origin of everything and transcendent authority (CCC 239)", a gracious and merciful [רַחוּם] God abounding in love and fidelity [חֶסֶד] (Ex 34:6). However, God transcends categories of male or female (CCC 239); *hesed* [חֶסֶד], loving kindness is often ascribed as a male trait, while *rahamim* [רַחוּם], mercy, compassion is ascribed as a female trait. The Father is neither man nor woman; God is God, the origin and standard (CCC 239).

Even the Holy Spirit is not given much attention, despite the charismatic movement gaining traction and Filipino culture being rife with spirits, *engkantos*, faith healers (CFC 1269-70). It doesn't help that the Spirit has no form, symbolized by fire (Ac 2:3) or light (CCC 696-97), and that the Spirit is not something objective but manifests in our subjective experience (CFC 1276-77). We should recall that the Spirit has been around since Creation (Gn 1:1-2) as well through the prophets. More explicitly, Christ promised us the Paraclete that will dwell in and with us forever (Jn 14:16-17). The Spirit is now present in the Church: manifesting the risen Christ through the Word, making present the Lord especially through the Eucharist, calling and gathering together the people of God as His Body, the Church (CCC 737).

## *Pakikibahagi sa Simbahan*

Our perception of the Church and the Sacraments has been deeply influenced by our culture, for better or worse. Filipinos are meal-oriented, hospitable people (CFC 37),

celebrating life events or achievements with fiestas where most people can partake of. This is reflected in the grand patronal fiestas, especially in Visayas and Mindanao, where every household prepares meals for everyone. Our fiestas bear similarities with the Eucharist, the memorial of the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23-25) based on the Passover Meal (Ex 12). Through the Eucharist, we share in the same meal: Christ Himself whose Real Presence manifests through the bread and wine (ND 1519). The gracious host that He is, Christ invites and gathers us as a community not only for spiritual nourishment but also for communal celebration (CFC 1680) of Christ's self-giving. It is Christ who leads us to worship the Father (Jn 4:23). No wonder the Eucharist syncs well with our meal-oriented culture, as most Filipino Catholics make it a point to attend Mass as a family.

Our Filipino culture also places a premium on belongingness (CFC 1353) and social relations based on family (PCP-II 19). This disposition is evident in the way we uphold familial loyalty, *utang na loob*, and "*Pinoy* pride." Hence, Filipino families have their children baptized as Catholics because it has been the tradition (*nakagisnan)* to ensure that they grow in the same faith. This is favorable for transmitting God's Revelation and the Christian way of life [Tradition] to the succeeding generations [tradition]. Children are taught prayers like the *Pasion*, rituals like the *padasal*, gestures that venerate the saints, morals, and teachings [traditions] which articulate the Christian way of life (Congar). This also exemplifies the Church as a community of disciples united by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (LG 4). In communion with each other in faith, hope, and love, we should build up and look after one another (1Thes 5:11).

However, family preferences and affiliation can also be unfavorable. The family can hand over traditions without proper explanation, at times even passing traditions laced with superstition. I recall pilgrims in Quiapo asking to be sprinkled with more Holy Water to receive added blessings. Moreover, a strong sense of affiliation may foster herd mentality and a harmful us-versus-them mentality (FT 152). In other words, too much emphasis might be placed solely in favoring fellow Christians (*ad intra*) and less on evangelization, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue (*ad gentes*). This is understandable given the lack of clergy [1 priest for every 13000 Catholics] and lay formation, as well as focusing on converting people to the Christian faith through debates.

In addition, many Filipino Catholics see the Church as solely sacramental and liturgical. Many equate Church with fulfilling the Sunday Mass obligation without a proper understanding of the Eucharist, ending up as mere spectators/ passive receivers of the Body of Christ (CFC 1671). It also doesn't help that the term "separation of Church and State" is understood as the Church's non-interference in state/ worldly matters, "rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's (Mk 12:17) ." These misconceptions obstruct the Church's mission "to announce good tidings of salvation… that all men may know…Jesus Christ" (SC 9), especially to the poor and marginalized (Lk 4:18-20)! This mission is imprinted into our identity through Baptism: to bear witness to Christ (LG 10) and live a Christian life in society (LG 40).

This sense of mission should be rekindled, especially among the laity. Mission is not for the priests and religious alone, since genuine social transformation is only possible when the people actively participate in a "people power movement" that affirms our gifts of freedom and responsibility

(PCP-II 325-27). The mystery of the Church is not just to bring God closer to humanity through the Sacraments, but also ultimately bring all people together (Jn 17:21) towards our heavenly home with God and the saints (LG 48). In short, being Church involves sharing God's light through our Christian lives that others may see …and give glory to the Father (Mt 5:16).

### *Pakikitungo sa Kapwa*

"How can we be silent about the God who loves us, the Son who lays down His life for us, and the Spirit who dwells in us?" (PCP-II 78) How do we bear witness to our faith? Worship is integral but "the Lord requires us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God" (Mic 6:8). Our faith is shown in how we treat and serve others, as well as in our care for our common home. I have seen the Filipino Catholics' faith realized through humanitarianism and *bayanihan* spirit: the outpouring donations of food those debilitated by the ECQ, the collaboration, and planning in helping Yolanda victims recover and build up resilience for lasting recovery,[8] and even the founding of the Kalinga Center, "a venue to empower the homeless to turn their lives around.[9]"

Filipinos are undoubtedly gracious and hospitable but the roots of social sin has affected our sense of right and wrong. This split between faith and action (CFC 680) occurs when our daily lives do not reflect our faith (GS 43). At the root of this are inconsistencies in conscience formation as well as "religious ignorance and secularistic attitudes and values"

8 Ronald Reyes, "Philippines: Catholic Church shares post-Yolanda' recovery gains," 24 November 2018, *Prevention Web,* https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/62186 (accessed on 15 January 2021).

9 AJ Kalinga Foundation Inc., "Vision and Mission," *Kalinga Foundation,* https://ajkalingafoundation.org/ (accessed on 15 January 2021).

(CFC 765). We see this in many occasions, like devout mass goers gossiping and slandering immediately after the Mass or those who promote animal rights but do not care a bit about human rights.

A more detailed, Catholic example focuses on the treatment of human life. Many vocal Catholics opposed the passing of the Reproductive Health (RH) Law for encouraging artificial birth control methods. This is tantamount to a violation against natural law and respect for human life. But these same Catholics name-call, use the pulpit to speak harshly against the law's proponents, and even endorse political candidates against the RH law. [10] While the clergy are allowed to participate in public discourse, they did not consider the proponents as well as the non-Catholics (PCP- II, 358). In their fight to uphold the importance of human life, they became uncharitable, even Pharisaic.

More recently, the extrajudicial killings at the wake of Rodrigo Duterte's War on Drugs caused controversy and even divide among Filipino Catholics. The fifth commandment explicitly forbids killing. Jesus Himself sought out sinners to eat with them and save them (Lk 15:1-3), earning the Pharisees' ire. Yet how come many Filipinos believe that these killings are necessary and even justifiable? Is it because the Bible tells us to be subordinate to earthly authorities because they have been established by God (Rom 13:1-3)? Have they not heard in the Bible about the many erring and even oppressive earthly rulers? Or is it because they consider drug addicts less than human? But are we not all affected by "sinful structures of injustice, oppression, and exploitation? (PCP-II 261-71) Or is it because we view them as irredeemable, and not our

10 Eric Marcelo Genilo, SJ., "The Church of PCP II after the RH Bill Debate," in *The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*: Quo Vadis? (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 177.

concern? [11] Pope Francis reminds us that "we are either all saved or no one is saved," because the poverty and suffering in one part affect the whole nation (FT 152).

If sin has crept into society and affected our hearts with violence and apathy, this same violence manifests in the lack of care in our land, air, and waters (LS 2). Each year, our country is ravaged by huge floods and mountain landslides caused by deforestation from illegal logging, not to mention the infamous 'Dolomite beach' that was illegally mined in a Cebu town.[12] All of these wasteful abuses to our earth are because of "shortsighted approaches to the economy, commerce, and production (LS 32) ." We misunderstood our God-given responsibility of filling the earth and having dominion over it (Gn 1:28). We did not treat our motherland with care and respect as a gift from our Father (CFC 348).

## *Quo Vadis*, Philippine Church?

Aware of the lights and shadows of the Filipino faith, what should we do in response? "Move forward we must (PCP-II 34)"— in intimately knowing the Father and the Spirit, in being faithful members of the Church, and in becoming a Church of Community and Solidarity (PCP-II 32). For us to move forward, we have to go deeper in faith. Just a seed has to grow roots, our faith must be deepened lest it withers or gets uprooted easily. If we want our faith to endure difficulties and uncertainties and respond to the signs of the times, our faith must go back to the source and be rooted in the person

11 Jayeel Cornelio and Erron Medina, "Christianity and Duterte's War on Drugs in the Philippines" in *Politics, Religion, and Ideology* 20/2 (22 May 2019), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21567689.2019.1617135 (accessed on 16 January 2021).

12 ABS-CBN News, "Preventing another tragedy: Why Cebu Province Banned Dolomite Mining," 9 September, 2020, https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/09/20/preventing-another-tragedy-why-cebu-province-banned-dolomite-mining (accessed on 14 January 2021).

of Jesus Christ (PCP-II 35) and to the source of our identity as Catholics: the Trinity. As we grow in familiarity with God through prayer, we will come to know that "no one lives and dies for oneself" (Rom 14:7) Like roots, our Catholic faith should not narrow our minds and hearts but open us instead to greater sensitivity and understanding towards the people and the world around us (FT 174). A deep, mature faith entails confronting the questions of our time and responding to the issues we face because "Action on behalf of justice … is a constitutive dimension of …the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation." (JW 6)

As we deepen our faith, we are also called to cultivate a culture of genuine encounter (FT 30). Filipinos are naturally inclined to socialize, but we also have that universal bias for the same affiliation. Genuine encounter does not alter or sanitize reality to favor our preference. We cannot shoehorn the faith into our lives and into others if we cannot truly encounter the situation of our land. Rather than debating on who is right, Pope Francis recommends dialogue (FT 47, 50). It may not be the easy and quick answer we expect from the messiahs we put up in our pedestals, but if we want our faith to last and have a lasting effect, it must grow slowly and take root. Thus, the way to a lasting faith is the way of genuine and lasting encounters.

To conclude, our Catholic faith the past 500 years is a gift worthy of celebration. There are many things to be grateful for. God's grace helped us grow in our familiarity with God, our identity as a Church, and in our Christian witnessing, but we must also respond accordingly. The gift of faith is both a personal and communal responsibility, after all. There remain many opportunities for maturity in our faith and

further growth, but we can only do so much. We are not the master builder, only the workers. As we move onward to the future of the Philippine Church, my hope is that we continue to ask for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest[13] as we do our best in deepening and sharing the gift of faith. We ask for the Spirit's guidance, as our Bishops prayed 30 years ago:

> Accompanied by the Spirit of truth, [may we] purify our popular devotions and rituals from some of the superstitions that still contaminate them. [May] the Spirit of Wisdom, help our BECs progress from external rituals to internalized values. [And may] the Spirit of fortitude, bring us out of our selfish isolation and gives us the courage to be involved in those tasks which lead to the transformation of our society. (PCP-II, Introductory Document)

13 Cardinal Dearden, "Prophets of a Future not Our Own," *USCCB*, https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prophets-of-a-future-not-our-own (accessed on 15 January 2021).

# Experiencing, Living, and Celebrating Our Christian Story

*Paul Richard G. Dy*

## Introduction

Although I was raised a Catholic, I lived more than half of my life as a self-confessed agnostic. I used to convince myself that life is composed of unrelated and uneventful experiences. In my mid-twenties, I longed for happiness; hoping it can help me discover the meaning of life. At that moment of groaning and groping, God had found and lifted me from my lowest point. It made me feel how the story of the two despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus—who were brought back to life by their encounter and conversations with the risen Jesus—sums up my own life journey. God changed my outlook towards life through the lens of His loving eyes of mercy; as the same love had empowered me. Now, I see my life as a grand narrative woven together by intricate patterns of meaning and redemption.

### Searching for Meaning in the Rhythm of Life

Such is the transformative power of the story of our redemption to transform lives and give meaning to our collective groaning and groping. Tad Guzie, S.J. in *The Book of Sacramental Basics* notes that there is a rhythm of three elements that makes life human: *experience, story, and festivity*. Everything begins with a raw experience; yet it only becomes a lived experience when significance comes into play. The lived experiences involve recognizing the significance in

the raw experience, which is usually related in some way to our self.[1] When an experience becomes significant, we put it into story form. Storytelling is our most spontaneous and basic way of naming an experience.[2] Furthermore, festivity provides a pre-eminent context for storytelling as we share our meaningful stories during reunions and family celebrations.[3] Retelling and remembering helps us re-enter our lived experiences with new eyes and a sense of purpose. An important experience is thus retold in story and remembered in festivity.[4] The story names our lived experience, festivity frames it.[5]

However, we do not always get to name our experiences. We tend to disregard what goes on around us; we live in the midst of stories larger than our own: stories of our families, communities, etc. These groups provide us with "myths," those larger stories that surround and affect us. They communicate values, frame our experiences, and shape our attitudes. There are many myths surrounding us that offer contrasting attitudes, which help form the whole construction of the meaning of life.[6] Our fundamental attitudes seem to be changed only by a new experience and by our entry into a new story. We call such changes "conversion" and we describe the source of the change as a new "revelation."[7] Going back to the Emmaus Story, the disciples were talking about their raw experience when the Lord walked with them, retold the scriptures, and explained to them that Christ should suffer and enter into

1 Tad Guzie, S.J., *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 8.
2 Ibid., 11.
3 Ibid., 15.
4 Ibid., 7.
5 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, 21.
6 Ibid., 72.
7 Ibid, 73.

his glory (cf. Lk 24:26). The larger story thus helped make sense of their experience, and they end the day with a moment of sharing and celebration with hearts burning.[8] Like the disciples, we are all invited to enter the Christian Story: to be in touch with our experiences of God's love,[9] to tell our stories about Jesus in our gatherings,[10] and to celebrate them in festivity to lead us further into the Christian experience.[11]

## Rekindling an Intimate Relationship through the Christian Story

The Christian Story began when God initiated a dialogue with Abraham and assured him of manifold blessings—to which Abraham responded with faithfulness. Through Abraham, the Hebrew people will recognize their own identity: a people whose God spoke His Word to them and reigns over their lives.[12] God began with Abraham, but His plan was to form a people, and through this people, save all people. The Story of Abraham was the beginning of Israel's ancestral experience of the divine Word that will continue into the tradition built by Moses and the Prophets.

In the Exodus Story, God's saving power and faithfulness to His promises is revealed. The liberation of the Hebrews from slavery left an indelible mark on their national consciousness and became the basis for the formation of a new nation and the ethical life of a new people. This event shaped Israel's perception of God as compassionate and faithful, giving them

8 Ibid., 23.

9 Ibid., 21.

10 Ibid., 22.

11 Ibid., 17.

12 Louis Bouyer, *The Eternal Son: A Theology of the Word of God and Christology* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor: 1978), 44; Dr. Joaquin Yap, "Theo 204: Ecclesiology," Unpublished lecture notes (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, SY 2017-18).

a reason to believe in Him. Moreover, the gathering of the people (*qahal*) around the Word of God (*dabar-YHWH*) was an invitation to enter into an enduring covenant relationship with Him, with God assuring Israel of His fidelity and God demanding that people harken to His voice in obedience and loyalty.[13] This reveals God's true nature, His mercy (*hesed*) and grace, His personal name (YHWH: "I-am-who-am," "I-will-be-there-with-you") and His salvific will for the people. Israel's election is not because of her own merits of quality and achievement, but out of the greatness of God's love. Not only are they called, they are called out (*ek-kalein*) of the many nations to be a holy people before the Lord to listen to His word and offer Him worship.

With this, God can be found in the midst of this world, in our story… and in all the ambiguities of ordinary human experience.[14] The Divine presence is captured in the Hebrew word *shekinah* (to dwell in a tent), presenting God as a wanderer like them accompanying them in their earthly sojourn to express His closeness (transcendent immanence).[15] But YHWH is also *merkabah*, the chariot of fire which God uses to traverse the universe as "the power which sets Israel in motion and urges the people on."[16] God progressively manifests Himself, through history as He raised up prophets to

13 Notes from Dr. Joaquin Yap (Theo 205: Revelation and Faith) SY 2016-17.

14 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, 73.

15 Louis Bouyer, *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture* (UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960), 117, Dr. Joaquin Yap, "Theo 237: God, One and Triune," Unpublished lecture notes (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, SY 2019-20).

16 Louis Bouyer, *Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism* (UK: T&T Clark, 1989), 87, Notes from Dr. Joaquin Yap (Theo 237: God, One and Triune), SY 2019-20.

deliver his Word to the whole people[17]: a word of salvation, of redemption, and of ultimate victory for God's people.[18]

## Reclaiming a Lost Identity through the Story of Creation

The salvation they experienced in the Exodus Story led the Hebrews to envision creation with an optimistic view of man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God[19] and that God created a good world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) through the creative power of His word (*creatio per vebum*). His creation exists out of God's sheer abundance of life and love emanating from His divine nature (*Dei Filius*, ND 412). This stands in contrast to the ancient religions of that time where good and evil clashed. The Book of Genesis thus affirms that God is the cause of everything good (*General Council of Florence*) and that God is bonded to creation through love. However, it also emphasizes human agency in sin as the prophets did, and recognizes in the Myth of Adam and Eve that radical evil comes when humankind refuses to acknowledge creaturehood in its complete dependence on God. While the traditional understanding of the temptation story ascribes the existence of personal evil to the "serpent," it can also represent the unconscious and endless desire within us of an evil infinite, the restlessness that makes us discontented with the present. Adam and Eve represent that part within us that is weak, the structure of finite freedom that is easily led astray. Being human is thus difficult because of this ambiguity.

17 Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (California: Herder and Herder, 1969), 20-21

18 Bouyer, *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture*, 18.

19 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, 73.

However, the story reminds us that Paradise as the place from which man was driven is an attestation that sin is not our original reality. It proclaims the historical character of radical evil but asserts that it is not primordial evil. "Sin" may be older than sins, but innocence is deemed older.[20] Beyond the human person becoming a sinner, there is one's being created. The Adamic myth is, therefore, a symbolic representation of the optimism of salvation that is eventually fulfilled by the grace offered by Jesus Christ.

## Redeeming Fallen Dignity in the Story of Jesus' Redemption of Humanity

The human journey, our being incarnate and living out our incarnation, was consecrated by Jesus when he totally embraced our human condition with all its ambiguity and lack of security.[21] Out of the divine mercy to save His people, the Word (*dabar*) became flesh and dwelt among us: Emmanuel ("God-is-with-us"). Jesus is God's Word, but is also an event, the Christ event—the incarnation of the Eternal Son, the hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth, the ministry of Jesus, the passion and death of Jesus, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost.[22] This is the fulfillment of the words of Scriptures (Isaiah 40:1-8, 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 53:4-12) and the eternal

20 Paul Riceour, "The 'Adamic' Myth and the 'Eschatological Vision of History" in *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, Beacon Press: 1967), 232-278, Jose Mario Francisco, S.J., "Theo 239: Creation and Eschatology," Unpublished lecture notes (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 2016-17).

21 Guzie, The *Book of Sacramental Basics*, 75.

22 Brian Daley, S.J., "He Himself is Our Peace (Ephesians 2:14): Early Christian Views of Redemption in Christ," in *The Redemption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 149-76. Manuel Francisco, S.J., "Theo 221.34: Soteriology and Mariology," Unpublished lecture notes (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, SY 2019-2020).

covenant of Yahweh's everlasting faithfulness in the face of Israel's turning away.[23]

As the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) dwelling among us, Jesus is fully human and fully divine. He restores to us, by His incarnation, our union with God and unites himself with each one of us. By shedding His own blood, Jesus reconciled us to God and among ourselves and "blazed a trail [where our] life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning" by suffering and dying for us. As the Risen Christ, Jesus opens the way to a new life where we can cry out in the Spirit: *Abba*, Father (GS 22, CCC 654). We thus received the first fruits of the Spirit that enables us to "discharge the new law of love" (GS 22).

The mystery of Jesus is ultimately intertwined with ours; Jesus invites us to enter it as fully as he did. The Story of Jesus is our own story.[24] Through His immense love, He became what we are in order to bring us to be what He is Himself (St. Irenaeus). He united humanity to himself in such a way that he remained God, unchangeable. He imparted divinity to human beings in such a way that he did not destroy but enriched them by glorification (Pope Leo the Great). This restoration transforms humanity through the forgiveness of sins and the human growth in holiness until it reaches its fulfillment in the resurrection of the body,[25] so we can have abundant life (Jn 10:10) free from sin as God's sons and daughters (1 Jn 3:1). It is through the Son that we are forgiven, sanctified, adopted as children of God, and deified.[26] This lifelong process reaches completion in eternal life with God; when grace becomes

23 Riceour, *The Adamic Myth*, 232-278.

24 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, 78.

25 Daley, *He Himself is Our Peace*, 149-176.

26 Daniel A. Keating, *Deification and Grace* (FL: Sapientia, 2007), 40, Dr. Joaquin Yap, "Theo 240: Sin and Grace, Unpublished lecture notes (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, SY 2017-18).

glory. The Risen Christ is the source and principle of our future resurrection (CFC 624).

As Christians, we are thus invited to graft our own personal histories onto the mystery of Jesus (Jn 15:5).[27] Christ died for our sins, not just our personal sins but encompassing all the "contradiction, brokenness and alienation characteristic of mankind on its journey."[28] The Christian, by virtue of Baptism, undertakes this same responsibility, accepts the human condition and the pilgrimage of human life. Baptism into Christ is a baptism into the death of Jesus so that "as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life" (Rom 6:3-4).[29] As Jesus shows, walking in newness of life and becoming ever more human is a lifelong process; Christ's universal redeeming love (CFC 577) declares that becoming fully human is the greatest act of creation in which we can engage.[30]

## Reassuring Divine Presence and Action in the Story of the Church

All these happened as a preparation of that new and perfect covenant ratified by the blood of Christ, a new race one in the Spirit. Jesus gathers the scattered People of God and reunites the whole human race with God through the mystery of His death and resurrection, recapitulating all things in himself and reconciling all things among themselves.[31] The work of God continues as we live a "life in the Spirit." United in the Holy Spirit, we all share the joys, sufferings, hopes, and responsibilities of heeding the call to commit our total lives to

27 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics,* 77.
28 Ibid., 67.
29 Ibid., 75.
30 Ibid., 119.
31 ND Intro to Ch VI: Jesus Christ the Savior.

the example of Christ. The saving presence and action of God in Christ is now mediated through the community formed and animated by the Spirit and faith called *ekklesia* – Church. [32] The story of God through Christ lives on in the Story of the Church, guided by the Spirit of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the Church comes from the Trinity.[33] God's gracious will and purpose is revealed and realized in Christ through the Church "to share with human beings the riches of his own divine life in an ineffable communion of love through Christ in the sanctification of the Spirit" (LG 2). The Spirit, dwelling in the Church through the believers, guides the Church to the fullness of truth and provides her with diverse ministerial and charismatic gifts in order to lead her to a perfect union with Jesus Christ. Christ is the one mediator who communicates truth and grace to everyone through the Church (LG 8), and the Church is a sacrament of communion with God and the unity of the entire human race (LG 1). It is to the Church that Christ entrusted the fullness of the means of salvation which are intended for all people (LG 48).

It is from our understanding of the Trinitarian God that we develop further a vision of the human person, society and the Church. By Jesus Christ, our fullness lies in imitation of his life and example. By revealing the communion of the Trinity, society ought to uphold a life of love and right relationships. Finally, the Church ought to mirror the ultimate destiny of all creatures by mirroring the mystery of the Trinity in its

32 Timoteo Ofrasio, S.J. "Theo 209: Christian Worship," Unpublished lecture notes (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 2016-17).

33 Bruno Forte, *The Church Icon of the Trinity: An Introduction to Ecclesiology,* trans, E.P. Hontiveros, S.J., C.G. Arevalo, S.J., and F. Gustilo, S.D.B., (Makati: St Paul Publications, 1990), 16 cited in Celerino Reyes, S.J., *That They Bear Much Fruit,* 22-23.

equality, reciprocity and mutual love.[34] The Trinity is the sign of our faith; the story we hold on to. The faith of this *ekklesia* is embodied and expressed and nourished through the sacraments.[35] The outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost ushered the age of the Church and leads it on. Christ continues to be with His Church through the sacraments, the communication of the fruits of Christ's paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church's sacramental liturgy (CCC 1076). Through the sacraments, we surrender to the transformation offered by the power of God, who promises to restore us to the divine image.[36]

## Living the Symbolic Life in the Church

The Church defines a sacrament as a symbolic act or visible sign which effects or makes present a spiritual grace-filled reality or actions of God in Jesus Christ, proclaimed, realized, and celebrated in the Church. A sign points to a specific reality; a symbol represents a mysterious reality, leading to personal meaning at the level of sense, image, feelings, and intuition. It also enables us to participate in the mysterious reality to which they point. However, a true symbol must be known personally and lived into so that its symbolic meaning can be found.[37] They bring into awareness the realities of loving and being alive, living and struggling and dying together.[38] The action is a symbol of God's care for us in Christ. Enacting the symbol brings us closer to one

34 Catherine LaCugna, *The Practical Trinity* (Chicago: The Christian Century, 1992), 678-682, Notes from Dr. Joaquin Yap, "Theo 237: God, One and Triune," Unpublished lecture notes (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, SY 2019-20).

35 Ofrasio, S.J. "Theo 209: Christian Worship."

36 LaCugna, *The Practical Trinity,* 678-682.

37 Ofrasio, S.J., "Theo 209: Christian Worship."

38 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics,* 48.

another in the Church to the Lord, who continues to be there for us.[39] The sacraments can be seen as festive moments that celebrate the continued presence of God as we journey on in our pilgrimage into the future.[40]

The sacraments are public and communal symbols that arise from the sharing of a common Christian experience.[41] When Christians gather to celebrate a sacrament, it becomes a festive action that call to heart their common story of a rekindling revelation, reclaiming of creaturehood, a redeeming love, and the reassuring accompaniment in the life of the Church. The commonness of the experience and the story are the dimensions of life that tradition has named "the faith of the church," beginning with the conviction that the story which we live and share is God's story as well as our own. The celebration of the sacraments calls us back to the myth of our creation, incarnation, redemption, and pilgrimage into our final glory as partakers of the divine nature—those larger stories which give significance to life. The commonness of the sacraments is meant to feed and enrich our personal stories.

These festive moments are suited to one's stage of growth in life and in faith.[42] There is birth and growth celebrated by the Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. There is also healing celebrated by Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. There is commitment and service celebrated by Matrimony and Holy Orders (CCC 1210). Baptism expresses a new beginning, a new relationship with God through Jesus and in the Spirit; the hope of victory over sin is manifested. Christians first experience the Lord's forgiveness, proclaim the mercy

39 Ibid., 60.
40 Ibid., 76.
41 Ibid., 130.
42 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics,* 80.

of God in their lives, then go to confession and celebrate it.[43] The Eucharist occupies a unique place among the Church's ritual sacraments; every work of the Church is linked with the Holy Eucharist and is directed towards the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the consecrated bread and wine (CCC 1211). It is in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup that the Church is healed and reconciled with God, the head.[44] In the Eucharist, Christians assemble, celebrate their lived experience, and commemorate the redemptive act of Christ and continually renews itself.[45]

The sacramental celebration is, therefore, a culminating moment that comes after a certain process has been experienced and lived.[46] A sacrament celebrates the Lord's giving, but this giving begins long before the sacramental moment.[47] We look at the stuff of our own stories and seeing that it is significant, we story it, we enact it, we feast it. We celebrate a love that is present to us long before we even learned how to celebrate it.[48] Sacraments proclaim and enable us to own a love that is already present to us. They help get in touch not just with a memory, but with a living present that contains a hope for the future and helps to carry us into the future.[49]

There is hope, there is a future, and the story is not yet finished. Deification, the process of becoming sons and daughters of God not by nature but by grace, already begins now and will be completed in the glory of heaven—from *gloria in via* (glory that is still on its way) to *gratia in patria* (grace in

43 Ibid., 87.
44 Ibid., 66-67.
45 Ibid., 57.
46 Ibid., 79.
47 Ibid., 88.
48 Ibid., 85.
49 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, 49.

its homeland).[50] Until then, the Church as the pilgrim People of God is on the way, but not yet in her homeland (*ecclesia viatorium, in via non in patria*).[51] This is the mystery of the Kingdom of God that Christ proclaimed and manifested in his person and work; it will be fully realized only at the end of time when Christ comes into His glory. But the Church on earth announces this mystery of God's saving love revealed in Christ, and already experiences it as a present reality (LG 5). God is present in life, always awaiting integration into our personal stories to give meaning and dignity to the whole human experience and existence.

## Conclusion

The self-emptying in the Jesus Story is a story of our redemption. The extent of divine involvement - the willingness of God to take on "the most lurid effects of human sin"—makes the Human Story a journey through human weakness into the divine life.[52] We take the simple things of every day and see if the Lord is there.[53] Once our eyes are opened and we recognize the Lord, we celebrate the mystery of God's love and the significance of being in this world and becoming human in it. Seeing better the stories we are living, we focus on the process by which we live, name them through our stories, and frame our experience in festivity—like the disciples in the Emmaus Story. This is the rhythm that makes life human.[54]

50 Yap, "Theo 240: Sin and Grace."
51 Yap, "Theo 204: Ecclesiology."
52 Daley, *He Himself is Our Peace*, 149-176.
53 Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, 135.
54 Ibid., 21-23.

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