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GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

"SPEAK, LORD…" (1 Sam 3:9): The CBAP's 25 Years of Listening and Responding to God's Word for a Wounded World

Salamat sa Panginoon! Purihin ang Diyos! The Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines celebrates its silver jubilee this 2024! With gratitude to our leaders, mentors, and colleagues who have endeavored to sustain our scholarly community, we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CBAP with the theme "Speak, Lord…" (1 Sam 3:9): The CBAP's 25 Years of Listening and Responding to God's Word for a Wounded World.

Speak, LORD, for the world is in crisis!

We are now in the first quarter of the third millennium, 2024-2025. As a human family and as a creation community, we have been through and are still facing a world in crisis, a wounded world, in terms of technology, health emergencies, socio-economic-political upheavals, and wars, as well as environmental disasters, among others.

Although technological advances in the new millennium are welcome, they also come with new threats and risks. The menace of 2000s incidents like the Y2K bug and the ILOVEYOU virus has evolved into more serious dangers, such as the more and more sophisticated deepfakes, which are used for online abuse, blackmail, and

scams.[1] Social media companies face criticism for manipulating data to spread misinformation, which harms democracy and fuels extremism, as seen in the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, Russian election interference, TikTok's data-harvesting issues, and the 2022 launch of ChatGPT, which can also shape political bias.[2] Nevertheless, there are still a lot of communities in the world that struggle with slow or even without internet access, which hampers their development.[3]

Health crises have also shaken the world, starting with the SARS outbreak in 2002 and later the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2020, which led to millions of deaths and continues to have significant effects on socio-economic, political-governance, mental health, violence, and

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[1] Vishal Singh and Prerna Chaudhary, "Y2k38: The Bug," *International Journal of Engineering and Advanced Technology* 2 (2012), https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=028107578dd31a64eeb268224881a39eac4584d1; Shannon C. Sprinkel, "Global Internet Regulation: The Residual Effects of the ILoveYou Computer Virus and the Draft Convention on Cyber-Crime Notes," *Suffolk Transnational Law Review* 25, no. 3 (2002 2001): 491–514, https://www.suffolklawreview.org/; Daniel Miller, Klaire Somoray, and Hallam Stevens, "A Shallow History of Deepfakes" SSRN, January 22, 2025, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5130379.

[2] Francis Russel, "Pox Populi: Anti-Vaxx, Anti-Politics," *Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 3 (2023): 699–715, https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833221101660; Maja Brkan, "Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: The Impact of Disinformation, Social Bots and Political Targeting," *Delphi - Interdisciplinary Review of Emerging Technologies* 2 (2019): 66–71; Laura Cervi, Santiago Tejedor, and Fernando García Blesa, "TikTok and Political Communication: The Latest Frontier of Politainment? A Case Study." *Media and Communication,* May 16, 2023, https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/6390; Fabio Motoki, Valdemar Pinho Neto, and Victor Rodrigues, "More Human than Human: Measuring ChatGPT Political Bias," *Public Choice* 198, no. 1 (2024): 3–23, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-023-01097-2.

[3] Elizabeth A. Mack et al., "A Review of the Literature About Broadband Internet Connections and Rural Development (1995-2022)," *International Regional Science Review* 47, no. 3 (May 1, 2024): 231–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/01600176231202457.

the environment.[4] Conspiracy theories on the COVID-19 pandemic and misinformation surrounding vaccines have also compounded these issues and now endanger vaccination programs and the spread of diseases globally.[5]

Economic challenges also characterize this first quarter of the third millennium, such as the global financial crisis triggered by the U.S. housing crash, resulting in global recession (2007-2009) and the Eurozone debt crisis in Greece, Portugal, Ireland, and Spain.[6] Today, we all feel the global inflation crisis because of the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and other

[4] Ali A Rabaan et al., "SARS-CoV-2, SARS-CoV, and MERS-CoV: A Comparative Overview," *La Infezioni in Medicina* 28, no. 2 (2020): 174–84; Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE), "COVID-19 Dashboard - Global Map," Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, February 15, 2023, https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html; Freedom House, "Democracy Under Lockdown: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Global Struggle for Freedom" (2020), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/COVID-19_Special_Report_Final_.pdf; Idiano D'Adamo, ed., *Assessment of Socio-Economic Sustainability and Resilience after COVID-19* (Basel: MDPI, 2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-0365-2720-8; Sheila Ramaswamy and Shekhar Seshadri, "Children on the Brink: Risks for Child Protection, Sexual Abuse, and Related Mental Health Problems in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 62, no. Suppl 3 (2020): S404–13, https://doi.org/10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_1032_20.

[5] Ipek Baris Schlicht et al., "Automatic Detection of Health Misinformation: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Ambient Intelligence and Humanized Computing* 15, no. 3 (March 1, 2024): 2009–21, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12652-023-04619-4.

[6] See Duncan Maclennan and Anthony O'Sullivan, "The Global Financial Crisis: Challenges for Housing Research and Policies," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 26, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 375–84, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-011-9231-z; Michael Ray, "Britannica Money: Euro-Zone Debt Crisis," *Brittanica.Com,* April 1, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/money/euro-zone-debt-crisis.

wars across the globe, and worldwide tariff-trade wars initiated by Donald Trump.[7]

Events like the 9/11 attacks against the United States in 2001 altered global security policies,[8] while the Arab Spring led to mass protests and changes in leadership across several countries.[9] Furthermore, the convergences of technological, security, medical-social, and economic-political upheavals have also favored the rise of right-wing populist governments with some of these features: nationalist, anti-immigration, "anti-elitist," "pro-traditional values," anti-democracy, anti-climate change and its mitigation, and pro-strongman politics. Examples are Vladimir Putin in Russia (1999 to present), Narendra Modi in India (2014 to present), Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey (2003 to present), Victor Orban in Hungary (2010 to present), Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel (interrupted rules from 1996 to present), Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2019-2022), Donald Trump in the United States (2017-2021, 2025 to present), and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines (2016-2022),[10] among

[7] Michelle Kilfoyle, "Ukraine: What's the Global Economic Impact of Russia's Invasion?," *Economics Observatory,* October 25, 2023, https://www.economicsobservatory.com/ukraine-whats-the-global-economic-impact-of-russias-invasion; Warwick McKibbin and Roshen Fernando, "The Global Economic Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Economic Modelling* 129 (2023): 106551, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2023.106551; Miranda Jeyaretnam, "How Trump's Tariffs Could Lead to Global Recession," *Time.com,* April 9, 2025, https://time.com/7275987/trump-tariffs-global-economy-recession-trade-war-asia-world-impacts/.

[8] See Harmonie Toros, Lee Jarvis, and Richard Jackson, "What the War on Terror Leaves behind: An Introduction," *European Journal of International Security* 10, no. 1 (February 2025): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2024.39.

[9] "What Is the Arab Spring, and How Did It Start?," *Al Jazeera,* December 17, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/17/what-is-the-arab-spring-and-how-did-it-start.

[10] Kurt de la Peña, "Evidence in Duterte ICC Case: His 'Kill' Rhetoric, Words," *INQUIRER.net,* July 17, 2024, https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1961835/evidence-in-duterte-icc-case-his-kill-rhetoric-words; "Situation in the Philippines: Rodrigo Roa Duterte in ICC Custody," *International Criminal Court,* March 12, 2025, https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-philippines-rodrigo-roa-duterte-icc-custody.

others.[11] Interestingly, most of these so-called strongmen were not able to respond well to the COVID-19 pandemic unlike the countries led by women who were able to better address the health emergency such as Angela Merkel in Germany, Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, Tsai Ing-Wen in Taiwan, Erna Solberg in Norway, Sanna Marin in Finland, Mette Fredireksen in Denmark, Katrín Jakobsdóttir in Iceland, and including Leni Robredo in the Philippines.[12]

On top of everything and with such a multiplier effect, natural disasters magnified planetary suffering, such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004) with over 230,000 fatalities from at least 14 countries, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (2005), and the earthquake-tsunami that triggered the Fukushima nuclear meltdown in Japan (2011).[13] In the Philippines, we reeled from the high number of fatalities as well as economic, infrastructure, and agricultural losses because of Typhoon Winnie in Quezon (2004), the Guinsaugon, Leyte landslide (2006), typhoon Ondoy's flooding of Metro Manila (2009),[14] the 2013 super-typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan which killed more than 6,000 people in Leyte, and the series of destructive typhoons in 2020 at the height

[11] Alessandro Nai and Emre and Toros, "The Peculiar Personality of Strongmen: Comparing the Big Five and Dark Triad Traits of Autocrats and Non-Autocrats," *Political Research Exchange* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 1707697, https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2019.1707697.

[12] Greg Orme, "Women Leaders Have Shone During the Pandemic: Men, Take Note," *Forbes,* August 4, 2021, under "Leadership Strategy," https://www.forbes.com/sites/gregorme/2021/08/04/women-leaders-have-shone-during-the-pandemicambitious-men-should-take-note/.

[13] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Fukushima Accident: Summary, Date, Effects, & Facts," *Britannica.com,* March 11, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/event/Fukushima-accident.

[14] Gregory Bankoff, "The History of Natural Hazards in the Philippines," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History,* 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.821.

of COVID-19 which even more complicated the pandemic health policies and responses.[15]

Your servants are listening and hoping…

Amidst these challenges, people grapple with meaning and ask, "Why?"—followed by pleas for God to speak and allow believers to understand what is happening in the world. While Pope Francis only referenced the COVID-19 pandemic in his letter to Fr. Rino Fisichella, the president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization,[16] the aforementioned larger global and planetary contexts make the call to be "Pilgrims of Hope" in 2025 a necessity. It is to this call that we, as members of the CBAP, are impelled to respond by means of meaning-making, by pleading "Speak, Lord…," by listening to God's Word, and by embodying the example of the Word-Made-Flesh.

In this special issue of *Landas* for the silver Jubilee of the CBAP, we present a glimpse of how our community of exegetes in the Philippines grapple with and yearn for God's presence in these critical times. Most of these critical analyses and reflections were presented at the celebration of the 25th Annual Convention in Mère Monique Retreat House, Iloilo City, on 20-22 September 2024. In this issue, they are gathered and arranged from general to particular topics, from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

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[15] Dennis Mersereau, "Why so Many People Died from Haiyan and Past Southeast Asia Typhoons," *The Washington Post,* November 12, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2013/11/11/inside-the-staggering-death-toll-from-haiyan-and-other-southeast-asia-typhoons/; Ian Christopher Naungayan Rocha et al., "Typhoons During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines: Impact of a Double Crises on Mental Health," *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 16, no. 6 (December 2022): 2275–78, https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2021.140.

[16] "Letter from Pope Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, for the Jubilee 2025," *Iubilaeum2025.va,* February 11, 2022, https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en/giubileo-2025/lettera-di-papa-francesco.html.

In the first article, presented at the last 10 July 2025 Business Meeting at the Loyola School of Theology, Sr. Ma. Anicia Co, R.V.M. reminds us of our beginnings. In "CBAP@25: Remembering its History, Celebrating its Stories," she showcases her recollection of the beginnings of the CBAP as a student in Leuven, as a founding member, and as one of the past presidents of the organization, our first female leader of the community of biblical scholars in the country.

This recollection is followed by our first keynote speech given by Peter Dubovský, S.J. (Pontifical Biblical Institute), and is entitled "Hope in the Moment of Crisis: A Study of Different Models of Crisis and Hope in the Bible." In this contribution, Dubovský explores and examines three models of crisis and hope as representative paradigms of solutions to crisis in the Bible: the divine wrath and reconciliation model, the God of history model, and the prayer model. He underlines that the elements of ritual, the role of God, and prayer are all necessary dimensions that allow hope to resolve crisis situations.

Pablo Virgilio Siongco Cardinal David, D.D., more familiarly known among the CBAP members as Bishop Ambo, focuses his presentation on the pericope from which the jubilee theme is taken. He completes the passage as the boy Samuel's response to the call of the LORD, "'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!' (1 Sam 3:9)" and relates it to the CBAP's "25 Years of Listening and Responding to God's Word for a Wounded World." He underlines that the Bible is an important spiritual guide in today's confusing world, especially with technology spreading both true and false information. He speaks from his own context in the Diocese of Kalookan as they face significant challenges such as the violent drug war, the COVID-19 pandemic, and environmental disasters. For him, the ongoing Synod on Synodality is an encouragement for everyone to participate in shaping the diocese's vision and mission through listening and involvement. Interpreting 1 Samuel 3 through a synodal lens, he emphasizes listening to each other and discerning responses to challenges communally. David's presentation has four parts: the call to listen, how the LORD speaks, the role of Samuel in Israel's history, and a reflection on listening to God in Kalookan today.

In "Michal's Legacy: Bridging Biblical Narratives with Advocacy for Women," Rodel Magin, O.S.A. (Colegio San Agustin-Biñan) conducts a narrative and feminist analysis of the biblical account of Michal, daughter of King Saul and wife of David, as recorded in various passages from the books of Samuel (1 Sam 14:49; 18:20–28; 19:11–17; 25:44; 2 Sam 3:12–16; 6:16–23). By examining Michal's story, Magin's investigation elucidates the multifaceted challenges women face, both historically and in contemporary contexts. He argues that Michal's narrative offers critical insights into ongoing gender inequalities as well as advocates for societal transformation and the promotion of gender justice. Framed between a theological and ecclesial context, his article aligns its call for action with the Church's affirmation of human dignity and the recognition of women's essential, though often unacknowledged, contributions. Echoing Pope Francis, Magin underscores the indispensable roles of women as foundational figures in community life.

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly changed how people and sectors operate, and its effects are still felt five years on. Fr. Maverick Pelayo (Loyola School of Theology) shares the sentiment of those he ministers to during the health emergency in his contribution, "'Incline Your Ear to My Cry' (Psalm 88): Walter Brueggemann's Theology of Lament in/and the (Post)Pandemic World." Pelayo discusses the importance of lament during times of crises for individuals and communities and investigates Walter Brueggemann's understanding of lament in the Psalms, focusing on Psalm 88, known as the saddest psalm. Pelayo first presents key themes from Brueggemann's views on the lament psalms. He then examines and theologizes on the actions and words of both the divine and the psalmist in Psalm 88. Finally, he outlines the faith and practical implications of Brueggemann's theology of lament and Psalm 88 for the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

The resurrection narratives in the New Testament offer hope amidst the challenges of our times. Rev. Rhoneil Arevalo offers to the readers the resurrected Jesus' words in his contribution entitled "*Sumainyo ang Kapayapaan*: Can Peace Be Dispensed? Searching for

the Probable Meaning of the Peace Greeting in the Context of the Religious Violence in John 20." From a textual critic's viewpoint, this is a formal translation of the peace greeting in John 20. However, Arevalo contends that the Tagalog translation may not fully capture the Gospel writer's intent. For him, the evangelist seems to imply that there is more to the phrase "Peace be with you" than just a greeting, as it appears three times in John 20. The structure of the chapter suggests that the gospel author is also encouraging the frightened disciples to be brave. This viewpoint is supported by literary devices, such as dualism, symbolism, and contrast, as well as context clues like the time (late Sunday evening) and locked doors, indicating the disciples' fear due to threats from religious and political authorities. The Greek form of the salutation offers alternative meanings concerning Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Considering the ongoing theological and political crises among the leadership and members of the United Methodist Church in the Philippines, Arevalo ponders how they can appropriate this peace greeting of the Risen Christ in John 20.

The ecumenical duo of Fr. Oscar Alunday, S.V.D. and Rev. Edgar Ebojo rounds up the collection of contributions. Amidst the hustle of today's world, rest is rare and is often seen as a personal need for mental health. However, "they wonder if rest should be always viewed from an individual lens." They ask, "Does it relate to the Church's life?" "What role does rest play in synodality and spreading God's Word?" Their Te-Er experience in Sadanga, Mountain Province, highlighted how important rest is for deeper listening to God's message. In this contribution, Alunday and Ebojo take us to an encounter with God's Word in the Cordilleran concept of Te-Er. With their adventure and misadventure in Northern Luzon, they underlined the vital tasks of biblical scholars in the Philippines—how to more and more spread the message of the Bible, how to dialogue this message with both our lowland and indigenous cultures, and how to live this dialogue for the good of our local, national, global, and planetary communities. Their article sums up this task, "Resting to Listen: Reflections on the Cordilleran heritage of 'Te-Er' and the Biblical concept of 'Rest'."

Two more presentations were included in the Iloilo celebration of the CBAP's silver jubilee, but due to the authors' other publication commitments, we can only include their summaries. Dr. Veronica Chiari Dy-Liacco (University of San Agustin-Iloilo City) addressed the politically, socially, and theologically difficult question of the "Deeply Jewish Roots of the So-called 'Self-Hating' Jew" against the backdrop of the ongoing Hamas-Israeli war in Palestine, especially in Gaza. The violence against civilians of both camps has attracted attention from international courts. The International Criminal Court has found both Israeli and Hamas leaders guilty of war crimes, with arrest warrants pending. The International Court of Justice is looking for evidence of genocide claims against Israel. Reactions worldwide against the ongoing war are strong and varied. Dy-Liacco's paper did not take sides in these reactions nor question their validity. She discussed the claim that Jews opposing Israel are self-hating, suggesting their opposition is rooted in antisemitism linked to the Gaza situation. Exploring Jewish life in exile, Dy-Liacco's paper argues for a deeper understanding of the historical roots of the conflict.

For her part, Dr. Ma. Marilou S. Ibita (De la Salle University/ KU Leuven/Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) titled her presentation, "'Pray, then, like this...' (Mt 6:9-13): A F.R.E.S.H Approach at Recontextualizing the Challenges of the Lord's Prayer." She proposed that Matthew's (Mt 6:9-13) version of the so-called Lord's Prayer presents traces of imperial-induced traumas in everyday life in their communities under the Roman Empire. These traumas, which evoke an anti-imperial response, are reflected in the evangelist's presentation of the prayer petitions and the characterization of those who pray (Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd). She employs a future-oriented, rights-based, ecological, and sustainability hermeneutical approach (F.R.E.S.H.) using a narrative-critical analysis with insights from the politics, economy, and ecology of the Roman-occupied Galilee, trauma, and ritual studies. Her analysis of the Matthean Lord's Prayer in its literary and historical contexts highlights how Jesus' teachings on prayer respond to the multi-faceted imperial oppression. The gathered insights were recontextualized in the Philippine contemporary setting and exemplified how biblical scholarship may contribute to the

promotion of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals #1 No Poverty, #2 Zero Hunger, #3 Good Health and Well-Being, #4 Quality Education, #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, #10 Reduced Inequalities, #16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, and #17 partnership for the goals.

Included in this special edition on how the CBAP endeavors to find God's presence in this wounded world are the two homilies during the Eucharistic celebrations of the community.

The first speaks about the call of Jesus to Matthew as the CBAP's celebration of its silver anniversary was held on the feast of the apostle, 21 September 2024. Bishop Broderick Pabillo, D.D. (Taytay, Palawan), a long-time member of the CBAP, underlined in his homily that the invitation of Jesus, "Follow me!" is meant for everyone. Pabillo highlighted that our different roles in serving the Word of God—as teachers, writers, scholars, researchers, Bible animators, and translators—show our commitment to living up to our call to follow Jesus in the charisms each member received. The duties of an apostle and evangelist are to be true to the Word and share the Good News to the end of the earth.

Finally, in his Sunday homily and mission-sending of the CBAP Jubilee participants, Bishop Ambo David—who was elevated to the cardinalate in 2025—recalls how he taught a biblical course called "Reading Between the Lines of the Scriptures: The Role of Imagination in Biblical Interpretation." He notes that James Barr's work helped him see that fundamentalism is more of a mental health issue than a hermeneutical one, as it hinders one's ability to see the difference between literal and literary meanings. Given this hindrance, David highlighted that there are two obstacles to learning that we must unlearn: pretentiousness and competitiveness. These attitudes block our ability to learn and relate to discipleship. Jesus dealt with these obstacles among his disciples through a symbolic action: by placing a child in their midst. For David, God has put Pope Francis' preaching and praxis of synodality as God's word for us today. Indeed, addressing our individual and collective pretentiousness and competitiveness that

destroy our communities and our planet lies in our capacity to listen to each other and, together, discern God's will, for the LORD will speak through, with, and to the whole created community.

Ma. Maricel S. Ibita
CBAP President
2023-2024

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CBAP@25: REMEMBERING ITS HISTORY, CELEBRATING ITS STORIES

Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M.

The theme of the 25th Business Meeting Dinner scheduled in July 2024 was "Remembering and Envisioning the Future of the CBAP." This sharing is a personal recollection of the beginnings of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines. The focus is on remembering. The memories shared are but a glimpse, a small part of the whole scenario of the beginning of this association. So that personal sharing may not depart too much from what had been written about its history, I consulted the article written by Fr. John Cabrido, S.D.B., which appeared in the publication of the 10th CBAP convention. The video posted on the CBAP website on June 20, 2011, by Fr. Randolf Flores, S.V.D., presents not only the immediate beginnings of the CBAP but also the early initiatives to establish an association of Scripture professors.[1] This video gives a broader perspective on the place of the CBAP in the Church in the Philippines.

I. Before the CBAP Came to Be – A Story in Five Acts

The CBAP video mentions seven acts. The seven acts may be divided into two parts. The first part, before the CBAP was established, consists of five acts. The early initiatives constitute a story in five acts.

[1] Randolf Flores, *"Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines,"* YouTube video, June 21, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdMrhyePmak.

Act I. In the 1970s, Most Rev. Cirilo Reyes Almario, D.D., the head of the Episcopal Commission on Biblical Apostolate (ECBA), formed the Biblical Association of the Philippines. It was discontinued for some reasons. The precise date or year when it ceased functioning is not recorded.

Act II. In 1986, Most Rev. Crisostomo Yalung, D.D., head of ECBA, exerted efforts to form a biblical association of professors. He met with students of biblical studies in Rome. He proposed to have a gathering of exegetes from different schools to serve as consultants of the Biblical Commission.

Act III. In 1998, when he was in Rome, Most Rev. Crisostomo Yalung, D.D. had a meeting with the students of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Biblicum), Gregorian University, and the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum). They shared their desire for an association of biblical professors to help them in their ministry in the Philippines.

ACT IV. In 1999, a group was organized, and the members gathered together to discuss the formation of an association of biblical scholars in the Philippines.

ACT V. On July 22–23, 1999, the first meeting of 32 Filipino Bible Scholars was held at the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) seminary in Tagaytay City.

II. The Birthing of the CBAP

The Articles of Incorporation of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines were formulated and signed by the following incorporators: Fr. Gil A. Alinsangan, S.S.P., Fr. Cielito R. Almazan, O.F.M., Fr. John A. Cabrido, S.D.B., Sr. Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M., Fr. Loreto F. Z. Miranda, C.I.C.M., Fr. Victor S. Nicdao, Fr. Victor S. Salanga, S.J., Fr. Herbert Schneider, S.J., and Sr. Niceta M. Vargas, O.S.A. I was assigned as the Corporate Secretary of the association. As far as I can remember, Fr. Schneider prepared or had the documents prepared. The Articles of Incorporation were signed in January 2000

and notarized on February 8, 2000, while the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) registration was dated March 16, 2000.

The first Annual CBAP convention was held on July 28–30, 2000, at the PHINMA Training Center, Tagaytay City. The official launching of the CBAP was held on July 30, 2000. Forty-eight (48) official members approved the CBAP Constitutions and By-Laws, and the members of the Board of Trustees were also elected.

III. The CBAP: Remembering When, What, and How

My involvement in the CBAP within its 25 years of existence is not continuous for some reasons. I was involved in 1999–2000 and then in 2014–2017, and from 2020 to the present. I will focus only on how I got involved at the beginning of the CBAP from 1999 to 2000.

I would like to begin my side of the story by referring to the handwritten account of Fr. John Cabrido, S.D.B. From his account, I came to know that way back in 1997, Fr. John, a member of the executive committee of ECBA, had already brought up the topic to Bishop Yalung. This idea preceded what we know as Act III before the birthing of CBAP. It was also Fr. John who thought of inviting Fr. James Swetnam, S.J. to be the Guest Speaker in 1999 for the first meeting of bible scholars in the Philippines. Fr. John held the first meeting of an organizing committee at St. John Bosco Parish, Makati. While I was not present at this first meeting, it was his second meeting that I was able to attend.

I cannot be sure about the dates anymore, but I remember that it was Fr. John who contacted me and invited me to the meeting. He, of course, mentioned Bishop Yalung when he introduced to the group the idea of forming a biblical association—an idea I certainly welcomed. Shortly after I arrived from my studies at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Leuven, Belgium, and started teaching at the Maryhill School of Theology (MST), Quezon City, an MST professor brought up the topic of forming an association of theologians. I took some steps to make this a reality, but after a first meeting of theology professors, I realized I had to do some research work that led me to

Fr. Catalino Arevalo, S.J. I realized that it might not yet be the time to have such an association of theologians formed. The idea, therefore, of forming an association of biblical scholars was something that I was willing to commit myself to.

I attended the meeting of the Organizing Committee composed of Fr. John Cabrido, S.D.B., Fr. Victor Salanga, S.J., Fr. Gil Alinsangan, S.S.P., Fr. Cielito Almazan, O.F.M., Fr. Vermundo Miranda, C.I.C.M., Sr. Niceta Vargas, O.S.A., and myself.

I was glad to be part of the preparatory committee for the first meeting of Bible Scholars in the Philippines. I was also included in the committee that would prepare the Articles of Incorporation, Constitutions, and By-Laws of the Catholic Biblical Association. The work was not tedious because Fr. Herbert Schneider, S.J. was with us. He came to the meeting with the prepared documents. I learned a lot from him about the process of organizing an association. Fr. Vic Salanga, S.J. was the leader of the group, and we usually met at the Loyola School of Theology. We appointed Fr. Gil Alinsangan, S.S.P., to be the treasurer.

We finally had our SEC registration on March 16, 2000, and the official launching of the CBAP on July 30, 2000. I think most of us who were at the preparatory committee were elected as members of the Board of Trustees. I enjoyed our meetings at LST because Fr. Herb would prepare our snacks. Those were the days….

Once a CBAP member, always a CBAP member. Happy Anniversary, and congratulations to everyone, especially to our present CBAP leadership, Dr. Maricel Ibita, and the members of the Board!

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HOPE IN THE MOMENT OF CRISIS: A STUDY OF DIFFERENT MODELS OF CRISIS AND HOPE IN THE BIBLE

Peter Dubovský, S.J.

Abstract. Three models of crisis and hope are examined as representative paradigms of solutions to crisis in the Bible: the divine wrath and reconciliation model, the God of history model, and the prayer model. The elements of ritual, the role of God, and prayer are all necessary dimensions that allow hope to resolve crisis situations.

Keywords: Hope, Crisis

The terms such as war, violence, and crisis on the one hand, and on the other hand, the terms hope, confidence, and faith occur often in the Bible.[1] They are not only worthy of linguistic study,

[1] See Miloš Lichner, *Is There Hope When the Temple in on Fire?*, vol.1 of *Theology East–West* (Wien: Lit, 2020), Daniel S. Diffey, "1 Kings: Power, Politics, and the Hope of the World," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 3 (2019); Stan van Hooft, *Hope, The Art of Living Series* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011); June Hunt, *Hope, Hope for the Heart* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2009); James Gordon McConville, "1 Kings 8:46-53 and the Deuteronomic Hope," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. James Gordon McConville and Gary N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a*

but the Bible also presents a comprehensive picture of these concepts and offers numerous illustrative examples of these terms that can serve as inspiration for modern readers as well.[2]

Indeed, the pages of the Bible are replete with examples of crises and hopes. The first creation narrative (Gen 1:1-2:4a) presents a tension between darkness and light, while the second creation narrative (Gen 2:4b-25) illustrates the tension between God and humanity. Genesis 4–6, in addition to presenting the violence, fratricide, and escalation of various forms of corruption, tension, intrigues, and other phenomena often labeled as sin, also provides insight into the roots of wounded humanity. In sum, the various types of crises constitute an inextricable element of the biblical narratives.

However, the Bible does not merely present illustrative examples of crises that pervaded various realms, including society, cosmos, and human hearts. Indeed, it provides numerous examples of how to address problems that afflict us.[3] The solutions presented in the Bible oscillate between punitive measures, such as the expulsion from the garden, and unconditional gestures of mercy, exemplified by the covenant after the flood. The history of exegesis demonstrates that

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Post-Christian World (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000); Charles R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (London: SCM, 1992); Charles Francis Digby Moule, *The Meaning of Hope: A Biblical Exposition with Concordance* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970); Rudolf K. Bultmann, "Hope," in *Bible Key Words*, ed. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf and Gerhard Kittel, vol. 12 (London: A. and C. Black, 1963).

[2] Cf. for example, Jacques van Ruiten and Koert van Bekkum, *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception, Oudtestamentische Studiën/Old Testament Studies*, vol. 79 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), http://oseegenius.biblico.it:81/pib/resource?uri=000000132759; Anthony P. SooHoo, "Violence in the Service of Order in Mesopotamian Myth, Ritual, and Historiography" (PhD diss., New York University, 2019); Marty A. Michelson, *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study of Judges and 1 Samuel* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2011).

[3] Cf. John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

numerous preachers, scholars, and individuals have already treaded the terrain of hope and crisis from diverse perspectives.

This brief introduction illustrates that an exhaustive exploration of the various types of crises and potential solutions presented in the Bible would necessitate writing several monographs. Thus, this paper examines three distinct models of crisis and hope that exemplify, I believe, the paradigms of solutions to crises:

1. the Divine wrath and reconciliation model
2. the God of history model
3. the prayer model

It is my hope that this paper will serve as an exemplar of how one might engage (listen) with the Bible and draw inspiration from God's Word to offer hope to our world that is and, indeed, always has been in crisis, a wounded world.

The Divine Wrath and Reconciliation Model

Let us shortly summarize the basic concepts of this model.[4] According to the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) traditions, the Bible included, God(s) could get angry and turn their wrath against a king, a temple, a nation, or an entire country.[5] Gods' behavior and motivations were not always accessible to humans and, therefore, not fully foreseen. The gods may have been angered because of improperly conducted cultic activities in the temple, or if these activities were neglected, if covenants in which the gods acted as witnesses were broken, or if the king committed sins. Often, however, there was no clear reason why the gods became angry. Once the wrath of the gods was unleashed, the

[4] Peter Dubovský and Iveta Strenková, "Is There Hope When the Temple in on Fire?" in *Hope: Where Does Our Hope Lie?*, ed. Miloš Lichner, vol. 28 (Wien: Lit, 2020), 34–42.

[5] For a most complete study on divine wrath see Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity, Forschungen zum Alten Testament. 2. Reihe* 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

consequences may have been cultic or political in nature. In the former case, the gods simply left the temple and found a new, more suitable location. In the latter case, the departure of the gods had an impact on the entire country, manifesting itself in the form of a hostile invasion, the plundering of the land, or as a natural disaster. The country, the city, and the king exposed to the divine wrath had to appease the deity, who, only then could return to his abode. Reconciliation between the world and the gods took place through rituals and sacrifices. The rituals alone were not enough, and if the reason for the divine wrath was the dilapidated condition of the sanctuary, then the sanctuary had to be rebuilt, or the sinful king replaced. The appeasement of the gods was practically manifested by the victory over the enemies who had devastated the earth. The invaders were driven out of the country, and a new king, according to the will of the gods, took the throne.

The epic of Erra offers a more detailed and nuanced reflection on this topic.[6] Marduk's wrath was directed against the entire world. The epic depicts the events from a variety of perspectives. The malevolent forces invaded the world. This state of affairs is mirrored in the disruption of social and cultic norms.[7] In terms of morality, the text describes a series of immoral actions, including murder, exploitation of the weak by the powerful, oppression and bribery, theft, public cursing of fathers by sons, and the subordination of male and female servants to their masters. Furthermore, these developments were reflected at the cultic level, with the introduction of taboo foods, the suspension of regular offerings, and the plotting of conspiracies. As a consequence of this deterioration of the situation, Marduk was incensed. The malevolent forces disrupted the cosmic balance, and the

[6] Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1991); Luigi Cagni, *Das Erra-Epos Keilschrifttext* (Rome: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1970); Luigi Cagni, *L'epopea di Erra* (Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Università degli Studi di Roma, 1969).

[7] Manfred Krebernik, "Wo Einer in Wut ist, kann kein anderer ihm raten: Zum Göttlichen Zorn im alten Orient," in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, ed. Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 52.

orbits of the stars were altered. On Earth, the Arahtu Canal overflowed, resulting in a flood that devastated the city and swept away much of its infrastructure. The residences and temples were transformed into a wasteland, with the resulting swamp providing refuge for innumerable fish and fowl. The deities ascended to heaven in a manner analogous to that of birds. The populace was dispersed throughout foreign territories, either fleeing or taken captive.

The theme of the divine wrath is well known in the Bible as well.[8] In the book of Exodus, the theme of God's wrath becomes a central theme of the Golden Calf narrative in Ex 32.

וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי וְיִחַר־אַפִּי בָהֶם וַאֲכַלֵּם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל׃

[10]Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation (Ex 32:10)

The expression וְיִחַר־אַפִּי בָהֶם literally means "the burning of one's nose". It is grounded in the ancient idea that emotions are connected with the bodily organs. In this case, the nose is the seat of anger, and its ignition depicts the nose's flaring or reddening.

According to the Book of Exodus, God's wrath could be kindled against an individual (Moses in Ex. 4:14) or against an entire nation (Ex 22:23; 32:10.11.22). The reason why God's anger flares up is cultic in the case of the story of the golden calf or disobedience to God's command (Ex 22:23) or to God's call (Ex 4:14). Using this theme, the author justifies not only the killing of the 3,000 Israelites but also the subsequent problems in Israel.

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[8] Deena E. Grant, *Divine Anger in the Hebrew Bible, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series* 52 (Washington, D.C: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2014); Samantha Joo, *Provocation and Punishment: The Anger of God in the Book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomistic Theology, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 360 (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2006); Kari Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology: The Anger of God in Joshua and Judges in Relation to Deuteronomy and the Priestly Writings, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 279 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1998).

To illustrate the literary form of this model, let us present the case of judge Othniel in (Judg 3:7-11).[9]

> REASON: [7]The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs.
>
> ANGER: [8]Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel,
>
> RESULTS: and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.
>
> REACTION: [9]But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord,
>
> SALVATION: The Lord raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. [10]The spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the Lord gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.
>
> [11]So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel, son of Kenaz, died.
>
> RELAPSE: [12]The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

This model not only interprets the ups and downs in the Israelite history in the pre-monarchic period, but it also constitutes the literary framework of the Book of Judges.10 There is a recognizable redactional effort to create a theological frame for major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson).

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[9] Jörg Jeremias, "Konzeptionen des Göttichen Zorns im Dtrg," in *Geschichte Israels und Deuteronomistisches Geschichtsdenken: Festschrift Zum 70. Geburtstag Von Winfried Thiel,* ed. Winfried Thiel, Peter Mommer, and Andreas Scherer, 135-51 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010).

[10] Cf. Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1–12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Bible* 6D (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 20–120.

Is there hope?

No divine wrath came without warning. According to the ANE beliefs, divine wrath was manifested in the forms of portents, dreams, oracles, and visions sent as premonitions.[11] It was necessary to pay attention to these signs and correctly interpret them. Identifying incoming danger and punishment could save the king and the country from disaster. The king needed specialists who were trained in more than one branch of Mesopotamian scholarship to interpret the divine signs.[12]

The interpretation of divine signs intended as communication with the gods could have been initiated by humans or by gods. If initiated by the former, the communication was achieved by means of special inquiry techniques such as sacrifices, casting lots, etc. With time, some of the techniques within this group acquired higher scientific and social status, such as *extispicy,* and others fell out of use, such as *omina* derived from observation of smoke patterns or oil-pool shapes. The scholarly recognition gained especially by the second group—the unprovoked *omina*. To this group belonged *omina* derived from the observation of astronomical phenomena, the human body, prophetic ecstasies, etc.

To stop the misfortune, it was necessary to find the real cause of the misfortune and apply an appropriate ritual *namburbu*. The whole process was often divided into several parts, and various experts participated in it.[13]

Implications

The divine wrath and reconciliation model was a well-known theological pattern that was widely used in the ancient Near East during

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[11] Cf. Stefan M. Maul, *Die Wahrsagekunst im Alten Orient: Zeichen des Himmels und der Erde* (Munich: Beck, 2013).

[12] *State Archives of Assyria* X, xvii.

[13] Stefan M. Maul, "Divination Culture and the Handling of the Future," in *The Babylonian World,* ed. Gwendolyn Leick (New York; London: Routledge, 2007).

the second and first millennia BC to explain, in particular, the political crises that occurred during that period.[14] The fundamental assumption of this model was the assertion that deities could become enraged with their land, city, temple, monarch, and populace. Once enraged, the deities would forsake their temples, and the populace would be delivered into the hands of their adversaries.

This model is grounded in a monolatric worldview. Each nation or land had its own deity, who was worshipped in a temple (typically the one located in the capital city). However, the behavior of the gods was not entirely predictable. They could become angry with their people for a variety of reasons.

In sum, how can we speak about hope in this theological and political framework? Following this model, the sole viable method for averting a crisis was to prevent it. It was, therefore, crucial to have a highly developed system of omen interpretation, as the gods conveyed their decisions in various forms, including the stars, the livers of animals, or through their seers, dreamers, and prophets. Once the gods became angry, it was necessary to appease them by performing the appropriate rituals and repentance. Consequently, the Deuteronomistic Historians demanded the removal of high places, the destruction of asheras, and even the murder of idolatrous priests. Therefore, Hezekiah's and Josiah's religious reforms were a means of appeasing the angry God.[15]

God–The Lord of History Model

The second half of the 8th century. BCE gives witness to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. O. Lipshitz calls this period the beginning

[14] Jörg Jeremias, *Der Zorn Gottes im Alten Testament : Das Biblische Israel zwischen Verwerfung und Erwählung, Biblisch-Theologische Studien* 104 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009).

[15] Lauren A. S. Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

of the era of empires.[16] Tiglath-pileser III and his successors, in a few decades, transformed a small kingdom around the city of Ashur into a full-fledged Empire. The Assyrian kings had at their disposal a superior army, a new state organization, secret services, diplomatic and political tools, science, art, literature, and religion. All these elements together allow the Assyrians to establish the first world Empire.[17]

The rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, however, brought to light new questions. How is it possible that the god of Israel and his land were under Assyrian dominance? Reading the Assyrian victories in the light of divine wrath theology, the defeats of the local kingdoms proved that the Assyrian gods were stronger than any other gods. Therefore, if the local gods were unable to protect their own people, city, and land, can there be any hope for the people living under a local god? In sum, the expanding Assyrian Empire made the collapse the foundation of hope grounded in the monolatric theological worldview. In other words, there was no hope for people trusting in their gods; the only option was to collaborate with the Assyrian gods and, thus, to compromise their own religion.

The geniality of prophet Isaiah showed the way out of this dilemma.[18] Isaiah devised a new theological model that laid a new

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[16] Oded Lipschits, *Age of Empires: The History and Administration of Judah in the 8th–2nd Centuries BCE in Light of the Storage-Jar Stamp Impressions, Mosaics. Studies on Ancient Israel* 2 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021).

[17] Shawn Z. Aster, "An Assyrian Loyalty-Oath Imposed on Ashdod in the Reign of Tiglath-Pileser III?," Or 87 (2018); Davide Nadali, "Sieges and Similes of Sieges in the Royal Annals: The Conquest of Damascus by Tiglath-Pileser III," *Kaskal* 6 (2009); Dan'el Kahn, "Arpad and the Whole of Aram: The Policy of Arpad in 9th–8th Century B.C. Syria from the Time of Shalmaneser III (858 B.C.) to the Annexation of Arpad by Tiglath-Pileser III (740 B.C.)," *ANES* 44 (2007); Peter Dubovský, "Tiglath-Pileser III's Campaigns in 734–732 B.C.: Historical Background of Isa 7, 2 Kgs 15–16 and 2 Chr 27–28," *Biblica* 87 (2006).

[18] Peter Dubovský, "Inverting Assyrian Propaganda in Isaiah's Historiography: Writing the Hezekiah-Sennacherib Conflict in the Light of the Ashurbanipal-Teumman War," in *The History of Isaiah: The Formation of the Book and Its Presentation of the Past,* ed. Jacob Stromberg and J. Todd Hibbard (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

foundation of hope for his people living under the Assyrian yoke. First, Isa 10:5-6 interprets the Assyrian expansion as a part of God's project. According to Isaiah, it was in fact the God of Israel who called Assyria into existence and gave her a precise task—to punish rebellious nations, among them, Israel. In the second step, Isa 10:7–19 presents Assyria from a different viewpoint. What the Assyrians considered the divine blessing, namely their victorious campaigns and their annihilation of nations, Isaiah interpreted as the Assyrians overstepping boundaries. The Assyrians did not consider themselves a tool in God's hands, but revolted against the one who missioned them. In the light of Isaiah's interpretation of history, the Assyrians will be equally punished after they have finished their task. The prophecies related to the future punishment of Assyria assumed various nuances, but the bottom line is that the Lord will use another people or nation to bring down the Assyrian hubris.

This theological model laid a new foundation for the Israelites' hope. Their God was not one among many other gods, but rather the Lord of history. The Israelite God is above all nations, in whose hands are the reins of history. The Israelites were not in the hands of the merciless Assyrians, who could do with them whatever they wanted, but rather both the Israelites and the Assyrians were in the hands

2021); Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Joachim Schaper, *Imperial Visions: The Prophet and the Book of Isaiah in an Age of Empires, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 277 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020); Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology, Ancient near East Monographs* 19 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017); Peter Machinist, ""Ah, Assyria..." (Isaiah 10:5ff.): Isaiah's Assyrian Polemic Revisited," in *Not Only History: Proceedings of the Conference in Honor of Mario Liverani Held in Sapienza-Università di Roma, Dipartimento di Scienze dell'antichità, 20–21 April 2009*, ed. Gilda Bartoloni, Maria Giovanna Biga, and Armando Bramanti (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016); Michael D. Press, "'Where Are the Gods of Hamath?' (2 Kings 18.34 // Isaiah 36.19): The Use of Foreign Deities in the Rabshakeh's Speech," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 2 (2015); Göran Eidevall, "Propagandistic Constructions of Empires in the Book of Isaiah," in *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); Mary Katherine Y. H. Hom, *The Characterization of the Assyrians in Isaiah: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (New York; London: T & T Clark, 2012).

of the Lord, the Lord of history. Isaiah's theological foundation of hope remained valid for centuries, and the model was applied to the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and its reminiscences can be noticed even in many current theological explanations. This proves that this model could be considered a solid foundation of hope for any oppressed nation.

Implications

Isaiah and his response can be compared to those of Thomas Aquinas or Karl Rahner. Isaiah and the scribes editing the Book of Isaiah established a novel theological framework for addressing crises. This new theological framework enables the Israelites to respond to the question of why this has occurred. Was our fate truly merited? One might inquire as to the location of God amid these circumstances. The response is straightforward: The notion that God is the driving force of history. God is the architect of a superior divine plan, which encompasses all events, both good and bad. It is noteworthy that Isaiah employs the religious patterns of Assyrian scholars to construct his new framework, effectively reversing their original intent. However, Isaiah's solution is not solely an intellectual exercise. The poetic style of chapter ten imbues his solution with a contemplative quality, inviting readers and listeners to reflect on and contemplate YHWH as the Lord of History, discerning his role in the complex tapestry of human history.

The Prayer Model

The last model presented in this paper shifts the focus to prayer.[19] In this model, the solution to a crisis is initiated through a dialogue with God. In contrast to previous models, this approach does not rely on rituals to resolve crises. Instead, it involves direct communication with God through prayer. Therefore, the resolution of situations involving

[19] Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl, *Prayers and the Construction of Israelite Identity*, vol. 35 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019); Walter Brueggemann, *Great Prayers of the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

war, violence, and other types of crises is achieved through the act of prayer. The act of prayer compels the deity to intervene on behalf of the petitioner.

Even though the prayer was a well-known aspect of Israelite religious practices, an examination of the biblical narratives that contain prayers reveals that the revisions of these texts made in the Second Temple period imbued the prayers with a new dimension. The prayer and personal dialogue with God, rather than rituals and sacrifices, became the most powerful tool for resolving crises in the period when the role of the Jerusalem temple assumed a new dimension. It served the nation and the priests who had no king. The Manasseh story in the Books of Kings and in the Books of Chronicles can be taken as an illustrative example.[20] A comparison of these two narratives reveals that the new element added to the Books of Chronicles concerns the prayer of Manasseh. According to the Chronicler, the evil king Manasseh was deported to Babylonia, where he repented:

> [10]The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they gave no heed. [11]Therefore, the Lord brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon. [12]While he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. [13]He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God. (2 Chr 33:10–13, NRSV)

[20] Peter Machinist, "Manasseh of Judah: A Case Study in Biblical Historiography," in *Stones, Tablets, and Scrolls: Periods of the Formation of the Bible*, ed. Peter Dubovský and Federico Giuntoli, ARCB (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); Michael D. Matlock, "The Prayer of Manasseh: A Pithy Penitential Text Recasting Scripture through a Vast Intertextual Repertoire," in *Intertextual Explorations in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Geoffrey David Miller and Jeremy Corley, *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyeter, 2019); Andrew T. Ohm, "Manasseh and the Punishment Narrative," *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 2 (2010).

וַיְדַבֵּר יהוה אֶל־מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶל־עַמּוֹ וְלֹא הִקְשִׁיבוּ׃

וַיָּבֵא יהוה עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־שָׂרֵי הַצָּבָא אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר וַיִּלְכְּדוּ אֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה בַּחֹחִים וַיַּאַסְרֵהוּ בַּנְחֻשְׁתַּיִם וַיּוֹלִיכֵהוּ בָּבֶלָה׃

וּכְהָצֵר לוֹ חִלָּה אֶת־פְּנֵי יהוה אֱלֹהָיו

וַיִּכָּנַע מְאֹד מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָיו׃

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלָיו

וַיֵּעָתֶר לוֹ

וַיִּשְׁמַע תְּחִנָּתוֹ וַיְשִׁיבֵהוּ יְרוּשָׁלַ͏ִם לְמַלְכוּתוֹ וַיֵּדַע מְנַשֶּׁה כִּי יהוה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים׃

The Chronicler not only adds verses missing in the Books of Kings but also demonstrates the manner in which one should engage in prayer during a period of crisis. The act of prayer (וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל) must be accompanied by specific inner attitudes and a particular approach to God. The verbs employed (highlighted in grey) indicate that the prayer was not merely a recitation, but rather the whole human heart, body, and mind are directed towards God. We can observe similar additions in the Books of Chronicles in the case of Asa (2 Chr 14:9–12) and Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:1–12).

Besides the Books of Chronicles, a comparable interweaving of the inner repentance and external gestures we can find in the LXX, such as in the Greek elaboration of Ahab's conversion in 1 Kgs 21:27/3 Kgdms 20:27.[21]

[21] Adrian Schenker, *Älteste Textgeschichte der Königsbücher: Die Hebräische Vorlage der ursprünglichen Septuaginta als älteste Textform der Königsbücher, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 199 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 97–98.

	MT	B	Ant.	A
Introduction	וַיְהִי כִשְׁמֹעַ אַחְאָב אֶת־ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה	καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου,	ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου,	καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου,
Inner movement		ὡς κατενύγη Αχααβ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου	ὡς κατενύχθη Αχααβ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου	ὕο κατενύγη Αχααβ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου
Weeping		καὶ ἐπορεύετο κλαίων	καὶ ἐπορεύετο κλαίων	καὶ ἐπορεύετο κλαίων
Tearing cloth	וַיִּקְרַע בְּגָדָיו	καὶ διέρρηξεν τὸν χιτῶνα αὐτοῦ	καὶ διέρρηξεν τὸν χιτῶνα αὐτοῦ	καὶ διέρρηξεν τὸν χιτῶνα αὐτοῦ
Putting on sackcloth	וַיָּשֶׂם שַׂק עַל בְּשָׂרוֹ	καὶ ἐζώσατο σάκκον ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ	καὶ ἔζωσατο σάκκον ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ	καὶ ἐζώσατο σάκκον ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ
Fasting	וַיָּצוֹם	καὶ ἐνήστευσεν	καὶ ἐνήστευσεν	καὶ ἐνήστευσεν
Wearing sackcloth	וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּשָּׂק	καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ᾗ ἐπάταξεν Ναβουθαι τὸν Ισραηλείτην	καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ᾗ ἐπάταξεν Ναβουθαι τὸν Ισραηλείτην καὶ τοῦ υἱὸν αὐτοῦ	καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ᾗ ἐπάταξεν Ναβουθαι τὸν Ισραηλείτην
Living repentance	וַיְהַלֵּךְ אַט			καὶ ἐπορεύετο κεκλιμένος
	[27] *When Ahab heard these* words, he tore his cloths and *put* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *lay in* sackcloth and *went (about) dejectedly.*	[27] *And on account of the word when* Achaab was *deeply moved from before the Lord and he went (about) crying* and tore his tunic and *girded himself with* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *put on* sackcloth *in the day he smote Nabouthai, the Israeliten,* and went (about in this way).	[27] *But on account of the word when* Achaab *has been deeply moved from before the Lord and he went (about) crying* and tore his tunic and *girded himself with* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *put on* sackcloth *in the day Iezabel smote Nabouthai, the Iezraeliten,* and *his son.*	[27] *And on account of the word by which* Achaab *was deeply moved from before the Lord and he went (about) crying* and tore his tunic and *girded himself with* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *put on* sackcloth *in the day he smote Nabouthai, the Iezraeliten,* and went (about) *bowed down.*

In sum, the later Hellenistic reshaping of Ahab's narrative indicates that it was not sufficient only to pray in terms of reciting words, but the prayer in the moment of crisis must be accompanied by proper gestures and inner attitude.

This Ahab narrative is not a single case in the LXX. A comparison of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Book of Esther shows a similar addition. Greek addition C in Chapter 13 adds the prayers of Mordechai and Esther. Similarly, we can add to this list the Hezekiah narrative. The Judahite king facing the Assyrian invasion, according to an earlier version, paid the tribute (2 Kgs 18:13–16).[22] However, the later elaboration of the story adds the prayer as the decisive moment for resolving the crisis.[23] Hezekiah's prayer not only triggers the solution of the crisis but also defines the structure of the prayer in the case of crisis:

1. invocation,
2. praise,
3. the description of the crisis,
4. petition,
5. motivation.

Implications

Pre-exilic Judaism revolved around some solid principles: the temple, kingship, and Davidic dynasty, promises, relation with God, Jerusalem as a chosen capital, etc. All these were put in crisis or question by the Babylonian invasion that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The kings, the temple, and cultic activities connected with them were no longer in place. In the absence of the temple and

[22] Cf. Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels,* vol. 2, *Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 213–63.

[23] Cf. Robb Andrew Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 155 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012).

its cult, the void is filled with prayer and interior conversion. However, it seems that not any prayer was considered to be efficient to resolve a crisis. Some elements should be noticed:

Who prayed? The Second Temple revision of the biblical stories indicates that the prayer of the king, queen, or another important person had a special value. As a king could bring the whole nation to sin, thus, the king could voice the cry of the whole nation.

How did they pray? Not any prayer was an answer to crisis. Second temple Judaism designed a structure of prayer with fixed elements. Moreover, the inner attitude and external gestures of the king were not sufficient. The prayer should be accompanied with specific gestures; thus, the king tore his clothes, the queen was fasting, the orators cried and humbled themselves, their heart was pierced, etc.

Where was it done? The analysis of the space in the Bible indicates that the space in which the prayer took place played an important role (temple, courtyard, inner room, etc.)

Conclusion

The reflections proposed above reveal three potential approaches to crisis resolution and, consequently, three bases for hope. The first model is that of divine wrath and reconciliation with God. In contrast with the concepts of wrathful deities prevalent in the ancient Near East, the Bible consistently emphasizes that it was human transgression that provoked divine anger and resulted in just retribution. The implementation of divine retribution was invariably preceded by divine warnings, conveyed through prophets or extraordinary phenomena. If the warnings were duly acknowledged and acted upon, the subsequent punishment could have been averted. If humans disregarded the warnings, divine wrath could have been mitigated through a suitable reconciliation with the divine, which typically involved appropriate rituals and a specific form of conversion similar to those done by Hezekiah and Josiah. It is significant to note that the aforementioned practices remain relevant to this day, including the celebration of

the mass as a means of reconciliation with God, the conversion and repentance of individuals and nations, and the belief in God.

It is insufficient to merely perform rituals; the Bible underlines the necessity to comprehend the crises and the role of God in them. For Isaiah, the crisis served as an opportunity to re-examine the monolatric concept of God, ultimately paving the way for monotheism.[24] The fundamental tenets of this novel theological system were twofold. Firstly, God is identified as the Lord of History and the Supreme Creator of the Universe. Secondly, each crisis presents an opportunity to re-examine the human concept of God. The crisis prompts a transcendence of the frontiers that we would otherwise never contemplate. A crisis may sometimes demolish our human thoughts and force us to be open to new horizons.

Performing proper rituals to reconcile with God and understanding the role of God in crisis is a starting point. It is essential to live through the crisis. The crisis presents an invaluable opportunity to engage in a transformative dialogue with God and with oneself, which may not be possible if one remains within the confines of one's comfort zone. A crisis has the potential to profoundly impact our hearts through prayer. I believe that if we omit any of these three dimensions, we can hardly find hope in our crises.

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[24] Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus, Orte und Landschaften der Bibel* 4.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); André Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007).

and patristic exegesis; religious reforms in the Old Testament; and living under the Assyrian Empire. He is an active member of various scientific organizations, including the Society of Biblical Literature, the European Association of Biblical Studies, the Catholic Biblical Association of America, and was also a part of the International Theological Commission. He is also a board member of various peer-reviewed scholarly journals and has written several books and journal articles. He serves as the present President of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (*Biblicum*) in Rome. He is currently writing a biblical commentary on the Book of Kings from the lens of reception history.

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"SPEAK, LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING!" (1 SAM 3:9) 25 YEARS OF LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD FOR A WOUNDED WORLD

Most Rev. Pablo Virgilio S. David, D.D.

Abstract. The Bible serves as a vital spiritual guide in today's world, filled with mixed messages, particularly due to technology that spreads both facts and false information. In the Diocese of Kalookan, we face serious challenges such as the bloody drug war under Rodrigo Duterte, the COVID-19 pandemic, and environmental issues. Currently, the Synod on Synodality inspires the adaptation of pastoral plans and the refinement of the diocese's vision, mission, and priorities by encouraging the listening and participation of all members. In this presentation, it is presupposed that interpreting 1 Samuel 3 through the lens of the synodal spirit highlights the task of listening to each other and mutual discernment of responses to today's challenges. The Synodal approach fosters collective conversations to discern the Holy Spirit's guidance. The phrase "SPEAK, LORD!" in the story of the young Samuel encourages a communal sense of listening to God's Word and spiritual growth. Though Samuel initially mistakes God's call for Eli's, his eventual delivery of God's message affirms the necessity of attentiveness in faith. This presentation has four parts. It first discusses how the prophet is called to listen and then expounds on how Yahweh speaks. Next, it briefly discusses mimetic irony to look at the pivotal

role of Samuel in Israel's history and draws parallels between 1 Samuel 3 and Numbers 12 as well. It concludes with a reappropriation of how it is to listen to and speak for God can be done in the context of the Diocese of Kalookan today.

Keywords: listening, synodality, prophecy, mimetic irony, drug war

Introduction

Thank you, dear colleagues and friends, for inviting me to share some thoughts on this beautifully formulated theme for our 25th anniversary as a Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines: "25 Years of Listening and Responding to God's Word for a World in Crisis," taking as source of inspiration—1 Samuel 3:9. Indeed, crisis situations are among the most opportune times to draw from the rich resources of our Judaeo-Christian faith—our Sacred Scriptures.

The Bible continues to serve as our most effective spiritual "hearing aid"[1] in a world often overwhelmed by a cacophony of discordant voices, especially in this digital age dominated by social media. The very technology that disseminates information has become just as potent for propagating disinformation, giving us a glimpse of both the best and the worst of human behavior.

The local Church that I currently serve, the Diocese of Kalookan, has faced three of the worst crises in recent memory of our nation: the brutal drug war under the government of former President Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022), the Covid 19 pandemic, and the ecological crisis

[1] The analogy was made in an intervention by the former Superior General of the Society of Divine Word, Fr. Antonio Pernia, SVD, at the Synod of Bishops on the topic "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," held in Vatican City in 2008. Fr. Pernia used the expression "hearing aid" as a metaphor for the role of a missionary congregation like the SVDs in the Church through their involvement in the biblical pastoral ministry, drawing laughter from the Synod delegates gathered in a general assembly. That, by the way, was the Synod that resulted in Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, published in 2009.

caused by reclamation projects in Manila Bay. We are also in a period of transition as a diocese, taking a new direction in our diocesan pastoral planning. This transition is being shaped by the ongoing Synod on Synodality.[2] We recently revisited and reformulated our old vision and mission statements, setting new pastoral priorities for the diocese. What has made a significant difference is the synodal orientation that brings about new energy to our pastoral planning process. Our former DPP (Diocesan Pastoral Planning), which we now call DSPP (Diocesan Synodal Pastoral Planning), has not merely been qualified by a new adjective—synodal. That singular qualifier has made all the difference by introducing us to a new way of being Church. This shift has revitalized our pastoral planning by disposing us towards greater attentiveness, consultation, inclusivity, and participation in all levels of ecclesial life.

Interestingly, 1 Samuel 3 has figured prominently in the ongoing theological discourses on Synodality, especially by theologians who emphasize the related synodal themes of listening, discernment, and openness to God's voice.[3] The Synodal way of being Church has put

[2] As we were holding this convention, preparation was being made for the second session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, or more commonly known as the Synod on Synodality, which was held in Rome from September 29 to October 27, 2024. Pope Francis approved the final document of the synod in its Italian original on October 26, 2024. An official English translation entitled *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* is available at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf

[3] See, for instance, the contributions of Richard Gaillardetz, Austen Ivereigh, and Massimo Faggioli. Gaillardetz highlights the importance of attentive listening in synodality. He uses 1 Samuel 3:9 as his point of departure for developing the same posture of openness that is central to synodality, where both leaders and members of the Church are called to listen carefully to the Holy Spirit, as well as to one another, in a spirit of communion. Ivereigh takes 1 Sam 3:9 as an illustration of the role of elders or experienced leaders—represented by Eli—as facilitators of discernment. He points out that the role of the ordained leadership in synodality has to do with the more essential task of guiding the faithful in listening to God and discerning His will communally, in the same way that Eli guided Samuel in responding to God's call. Faggioli points out that synodality

a premium on the method of Scripture-guided "Conversations in the Spirit" and the practice of the discipline of communal discernment towards consensus-building in the Church, where the faithful, ordained, consecrated, and lay, women and men alike, listen together to the Holy Spirit. Within the framework of 1 Sam 3:9, "SPEAK, LORD!" has to mean, primarily, "Speak TO US, Lord…" before it can mean "Speak THROUGH US, Lord!" A synodal Church empowers its members through communion, participation, and mission to become a truly prophetic Church, a Church that "listens and responds to God's Word for a wounded world."

The Prophet Listens

The prophet is indeed one who is called to proclaim God's Word, but first, he must listen. Let me highlight just a few important contributions in this regard, by Walter Brueggemann, Abraham Heschel, and N.T. Wright.

In his seminal work, *The Prophetic Imagination,* Walter Brueggemann emphasizes that attentive listening is central to the prophetic task. He points out that prophets must first listen to God with openness and humility before they can speak on God's behalf. Otherwise, they merely speak from their own perspective or carry out their own agenda. For Brueggemann, true prophecy begins with "yielding to God's voice, often in quiet reflection." Only thereafter does the prophet act as an instrument of divine communication.[4] Many other

opens the Church to new, sometimes unexpected, voices, including those of young people, marginalized groups, or those outside traditional structures of authority, including those who may not traditionally have been given a platform. This openness to God echoes Samuel's calling as a young, unheard voice raised up by God to bring change. In Richard Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 92–95; A. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014), 213–215; and Massimo Faggioli, *A New Era in the Church: The Synodal Process*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2021), 56-58.

[4] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 22–26.

scholars likewise emphasize the foundational importance of attentive listening to the prophetic role. This posture is not passive; it involves active engagement, reflection, and cooperation in communicating the divine message. Whether seen in the example of Samuel or through the apostolic tradition, listening remains a critical aspect of proclaiming God's Word both in ancient and contemporary contexts.[5]

Biblical theologians usually point to Samuel as the biblical model for attentive listening in the context of his prophetic role. Ironically, in 1 Samuel 3:9, it is the inattentive old priest Eli who disposes the young Samuel to respond with attentiveness to God's call by instructing him to say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." We will delve into this narrative critical tool called "mimetic irony" later. Suffice it to say for now that this text reflects the importance of first listening carefully to God's message. This attitude of readiness and humility sets Samuel apart and is expected to be a key characteristic for those who proclaim God's Word today.[6]

Although a bit dated, Abraham Heschel's work, *The Prophets* (1962), remains insightful in that it underscores the fact that attentive listening involves more than just hearing words; it requires a "spiritual sensitivity" and a "deep moral engagement with the message received". Heschel explains that prophets are not to be treated as mere passive receivers of a divine message; they actively respond to what they hear, aligning their lives and proclamations with God's will. Heschel also notes that this kind of attentiveness is marked by a willingness to be transformed by the Word before proclaiming it to others.[7]

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[5] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 22–26; See also D.T. Lamb, *1 & 2 Samuel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[6] See, for example, D. T. Lamb, *1 & 2 Samuel,* 45–48.

[7] A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 245–247.

For his part, N.T. Wright reflects on how present-day preachers and proclaimers of God's Word are tasked with discerning God's voice amid the noise of the world, requiring deep spiritual attentiveness and reflection. Wright says faithful proclamation can come only from listening carefully to Scripture and the Spirit, ensuring that the Word of God is transmitted authentically.[8]

Yahweh Speaks

Not a few scholars have pointed out the notable textual difference between the instruction, as given by Eli in 1 Sam 3:9, and the actual reply of the young Samuel in v. 10. Already from v. 8, the author tells us that Eli "realized that Yahweh was calling the boy." And so, Eli's instruction in v. 9 was as follows, "If someone calls you, say, 'Speak, Yahweh, for your servant is listening'." And then we are told in v. 10 that when Samuel heard the voice for the fourth time, omitting the divine name, his reply was simply "Speak! For your servant is listening."[9] Some scholars suggest that the omission of "Yahweh" in Samuel's response could be intentional.[10] Namely, that it reflects the fact that Samuel, up to this point, did not yet fully recognize or know the Lord (as explicitly stated in 1 Samuel 3:7). Therefore, his response is neutral, not explicitly naming Yahweh, which would be more consistent with the graduality of his awakening to the divine call. Other scholars view the omission of "Yahweh" as a "literary technique", suggesting that the omission is intended deliberately to create a narrative tension.

[8] N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 32–35.

[9] P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary, The Anchor Bible,* vol. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 95. McCarter notes the text-critical variance between LXXB, which omits *YHWH,* as against MT and LXX, which include *YHWH*. He favors the omission. This subtle omission obviously raises some issues about textual transmission, theological intent, and scribal practices.

[10] See, for example, David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel, New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 167–170.

That way, Samuel's eventual recognition of Yahweh's voice and calling is presented unfolding slowly, and the absence of the divine name "Yahweh" in verse 10 will reinforce the graduality of the process of spiritual revelation.[11]

Eli Instructs Samuel

The author establishes the context of this call narrative[12] from the start: the corruption of the two sons of Eli, who had inherited the priestly office from their elderly father, and the looming crisis situation that is about to befall Israel. It is the chapter that immediately follows the infancy narrative about the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 1-3)—namely, Israel's impending defeat in their battle against the Philistines, the capture of the ark of the covenant, the death of thirty thousand foot soldiers and the disastrous end of the sons of Eli (1 Sam 4).[13]

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[11] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 117–119. See also John Walton, who notes that "in ancient Near Eastern texts, the specificity of a deity's name could be a marker of familiarity and recognition." In Samuel's case, Walton points out that the omission of "Yahweh" could signal the early stage of Samuel's prophetic journey, where he has not yet fully understood or developed the intimate relationship with God that would later define his role as a prophet. In *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament, Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 240–242.

[12] Some form-critical scholars, such as Walter Brueggemann, have questioned the classification of 1 Samuel 1–3 as a prophetic call narrative. Brueggemann argues that chapters 1 and 2 are not really focused on prophetic themes but rather on the prayer of Hannah and the dedication of Samuel to temple service. He suggests that while 1 Samuel 3 is indeed consistent with typical call narrative structure, the surrounding chapters make it serve broader narrative purposes, including priestly corruption and national renewal. See Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel,* Interpretation Commentary (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 20–22.

[13] The author depicts Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, as corrupt priests who abuse their priestly authority, "taking the best portions of sacrifices and committing immoral acts" (1 Samuel 2:12–17). He also underscores the fact that, despite knowing about their actions, Eli fails to discipline them. This situation

Samuel could not have discovered his prophetic calling if, as yet a young boy, he had not been taught by the old priest Eli to direct his response to the one who was really calling him: God.[14] The realization that the call was coming from God actually dawned on Eli already after the third call when the boy came rushing to him again and said *Hinneni, ki qara'ta* for a third time. And so, he would instruct Samuel to say, "Speak, *Yhwh,* your servant is listening." Could this mean Eli had realized that God was trying to bring across a message to him through this young boy?

Eli was not exactly clueless as to what God's message was about. The author tells us that in the previous chapter, 1 Sam 2:27-36, a "man of God"[15] had already conveyed to him God's displeasure about the behavior of his two sons, and about Eli's inability to restrain them from committing any further depravity in the way they exercised their priestly leadership over God's people. In vv. 33b-34, that unnamed prophet had already pronounced an oracle of doom against Eli's house: "…all the rest of your house will fall by the swords of men. And this, which will happen to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you: both of them will die in a single day."

And so, fast forward, the morning after the persistent calls that roused Samuel and prompted Eli (after the third time) to instruct the boy what to say in reply, Eli summons the boy and asks him to disclose the message that he received from God. It is noteworthy that the author does not write in detail what God had asked Samuel to say to

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eventually leads to God's judgment on his household. See the Commentary on the Books of Samuel in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol.2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998).

[14] The Hebrew reply to a call is *hinneni*, which literally translates, "Here I am!" The boy's actual reply is even longer: *hinneni ki qara'ti*, "Here I am, for you called me." Curiously, in Tagalog we are able to express the exact sense of this long statement with just a two-letter word: *"Po?"*

[15] Meaning, a prophet. This was just one of the various nomenclatures for the earlier or "non-writing prophets." The other terms used were "seer," "visionary," "medium," etc. See commentaries on 1 Sam 9:9 and Amos 7:14.

Eli. He simply says in v. 18, "So Samuel told him everything, and held nothing back." After hearing it, Eli does not even react with surprise about it. Instead, in a mood of resignation, he would simply say, "He is *Yhwh*. Let him do what seems best to him." This could only mean that what Samuel had reported to Eli was basically just a reiteration of the oracle that had earlier been pronounced against his family by a "man of God" (1 Sam 2:27-36). It merely confirmed for him the authenticity of the unnamed prophet's earlier message to him. But now he already had an idea who the "man of God" meant when he closed his oracle predicting the coming of "a faithful priest who will do as I intend and desire. I will build for him a secure house, and he will walk before my anointed forever" (1 Sam 2:35).

Mimetic Irony

It was at the Loyola School of Theology where I first heard the term "mimetic irony."[16] The professor was bringing with him a poster to illustrate what this narrative-critical tool was supposed to mean. The poster portrayed a bearded and long-haired character looking like the typical caricature of Jesus hiding behind a rock while a group of theologians wearing black clerical shirts and suits was busy looking for him everywhere except where he was, bowing low like he was playing hide and seek with them. None of them could locate Jesus, except a little child who could see him plainly from where he was standing, next to the rock. The child tries to call the attention of the theologians, but he is too small to even be noticed by them. Meanwhile, Jesus is making a gesture to the child with his index finger crossed against his lips, as if to say, "Don't tell them, ok?" The poster did not say much, but it did make me understand what a "mimetic irony" was basically about.

It is what some scholars tell us we are also dealing with in 1 Sam 3. The dramatic contrast cannot be missed between the old priest Eli on the one hand, and the young boy Samuel on the other hand. How he, on the one hand, who is the seasoned priest, is portrayed as spiritually

[16] Narrative critics use the term "mimetic irony" to refer to a literary technique where the narrative mirrors or imitates a situation or behavior in an ironic or contradictory way.

dim and unable to "hear" God's voice. Meanwhile, his innocent young assistant, on the other hand, is the one who hears God's voice and casually responds to it, although he misinterprets it to be a call from his old master. This paradox is what scholars might call a "mimetic irony".[17] One cannot fail to recognize the apparent discrepancy between expectation and reality in the roles played by the two characters.

Samuel: Pivotal Figure in Israelite History

As an important Biblical figure, Samuel's uniqueness lies in the fact that he held all three roles of priest, prophet, and judge at the same time. It is a rather rare combination in biblical history. He plays a pivotal role in Israel's transition from the time of the Judges to the establishment of the united monarchy, first under Saul, and later under David. His role as a prophet distinguished him as God's chosen messenger, while his priestly duties and judicial leadership established him as a multifaceted leader in Israel during a critical period of its history. It was under Samuel's leadership that Israel got stabilized as a nation and transitioned from being a loose confederation of tribes into a kingdom under a unified monarchy.[18]

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[17] See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 114–118, where he discusses the layered use of irony in biblical texts and highlights how Samuel's repeated failure to recognize God's voice and Eli's eventual realization is both "a reflection of and commentary on Israel's spiritual state." See also Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 21–24, where Alter elaborates on the ironic dynamics in the story of Samuel's call, noting how Samuel's misunderstanding of God's voice and Eli's eventual recognition are used "to reflect both the personal and national crises in leadership at the time." See also David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 165–172, where he explains that the narrative's irony is part of a broader literary strategy that emphasizes the contrast between the spiritual readiness of Samuel and the blindness of Eli. Samuel's initial misunderstanding "mirrors the larger disorientation of Israel at the time".

[18] Scholars attribute the repudiation of the monarchy in 1 Samuel 8:6–9 to a later redactor. In this text, we hear about Samuel's apparent displeasure about the nation's request for a king, which he grants, nevertheless, because the Lord had

Samuel is often regarded by scholars as the first significant prophet after Moses. His role as a prophet is essential in the leadership transition in Israel from judges to kings. Samuel's prophetic authority was crucial in guiding Israel as it shifted from tribal confederation to monarchy. He would anoint Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, emphasizing the theological conviction that kingship was under divine control. Meaning, if the prophet's role was to speak on behalf of God, the king's role was to rule on behalf of Yahweh, the real king.[19]

Samuel is likewise being presented by the author as the turning point from the prophet as a "seer" (*hozeh* or *ro'eh*) to the prophet as a messenger or spokesperson (*nabi'*). This shift in the role is consistent with that famous parenthetical remark of the same author in 1 Sam 9:9, "In former times in Israel, anyone who went to consult God used to say, 'Come let us go to the seer.' For the one who is now called prophet (*nabi'*) was formerly called seer (*ro'eh*)."[20]

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told him, "You are not the one they are rejecting. They are rejecting me as their king." It is interesting to note how this redactor would characterize the monarchy as a repudiation of God's kingship. See *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), vol. 2, 938–947.

[19] See Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991; reprint edition), vol. 2, 292–296.

[20] But see P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *Commentary on 1 Samuel, The Anchor Bible,* vol. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 177, who says, "But we may not conclude that it derives from a time when *ro'eh,* 'seer,' was an obsolete term requiring editorial explanation… The notice is redactional, intended to harmonize the present tale, in which Samuel is called 'seer' and 'man of God,' with the preceding material in which he is called "prophet.' …(T)he author of the notice considers *nabi'* 'prophet' to be the primary, contemporary designation and that he regards *ro'eh* as somewhat old-fashioned." That redactor seems to be reflecting a mentality that comes closer to the time of Amos in the 8th century BCE, the southern prophet from the Tekoa in Judah who prophesied in the north. He was, therefore, being driven away by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel of the northern kingdom of Israel, and asked to return to his country. In Amos 7:14, the latter refers to Amos pejoratively as a "seer" (*hozeh*, Amos 7:12). But Amos reacts vehemently and says: *Lo nabi' anoki* "I was not a prophet." (Amos 7:14) He explains that he was not what the priest thought he was—namely, a seer who "earned his

1 Samuel 3 and Numbers 12

Scholars see in 1 Samuel 3 what they call an obvious allusion to Numbers 12, where the one who is being presented as the prototype of the prophet as messenger, or the prophet par excellence, is no less than Moses himself. Speaking to Aaron and Miriam, who were questioning the authority of Moses, Yhwh supposedly said, "If there are prophets among you," *bamar'eh elaw etwadda' bachalom 'adabber-bo* "in visions I make myself known to them, in dreams I speak to them…" The author is obviously alluding to the older template of prophetism—people who foretold the future based on dreams and visions whose authenticity could be validated only by the actual occurrence of what has been foretold. In Moses, the author is presenting the only prototype of what a genuine prophet was supposed to be—namely, the humble servant who is *ne'eman* "worthy of *Yhwh's* trust" Num 12:7, and to whom Yhwh speaks *peh el-peh* "face to face" (Num 12:8)—meaning, *umar'eh welo' bechidoth* "plainly and not in riddles."[21]

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bread" by engaging in fortune-telling, or in prophesying in its earlier sense—as a "visionary" or as a dream interpreter who did it as a source of income or a means of livelihood. Amos asserts, rather, that he was in fact "a sheep-breeder and a dresser of sycamore trees," meaning—a relatively well-off man who did not even demand money for his services as a prophet. Rather, he was prophesying in the sense of *nabi'*, God's messenger, because he had received a message from Yhwh and was bound by obedience to convey the message whether or not the intended addressees found it favorable. In Amos 3:8, the prophet attributes the compulsion to a divine mandate: "The lion has roared, who would not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who would not prophesy?"

[21] See Exod. 33:11, where the author underscores God's intimacy with Moses: *wedibber Yhwh 'el-Mosheh panim 'el-panim ka'asher yedabber 'ish 'el-re'ehu*—"The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to a friend…" Not seeming to mind the contradiction, the author would, however, qualify the intimacy when later in the text Moses would make a request in v. 18 to be allowed to see God's glory (*har'eni na' 'et-kebodeka*), and God grants his request in vv.19–20 but qualifies, "I show favor to whom I will… I grant mercy to whom I will, but *lo' tukal lir'oth panay*—you cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live." This tradition about equating the idea of "seeing the face of God" with death is verbalized by the prophet Isaiah in Isa 6:5, where he says after seeing a vision of Yhwh "seated on a high and lofty throne." The prophet exclaims, "Woe is me, I am doomed.

This gift of being able to communicate "face-to-face" with Yhwh seems to be the whole point behind the covenant relationship being initiated by Yahweh, such as with the patriarch Jacob.[22] In the conversation between Jesus and Nathanael, the writer of the Fourth Gospel makes a deliberate allusion to this dream narrative in Gen 28 when Jesus reacts to Nathanael's sudden confession of faith in him as "the Son of God…" and "King of Israel," assuring him that he was yet to see "greater things" (Jn 1:50), namely, "the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (Jn 1:51). In short, the writer is going to the extent of suggesting, not just the idea of God coming down and standing face-to-face with humankind, but the Son of God becoming himself a Son of Man and serving as the bridge or the covenant between heaven and earth, between divinity and humanity.

In 1 Sam 3, the boy Samuel is obviously neither having a dream nor a vision. Rather, he is "hearing" God calling him directly and wanting to communicate a message to him. However, he is yet unable to pick up God's message, misinterpreting the call to have come from Eli because, as the author explicitly states in the text, 1 Sam 3:7, "Samuel did not yet recognize the Lord, since the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." That line is enough to suggest what the author's understanding was about this "new form of prophecy"; it is not about the seer's glimpse of the future through a dream or a vision,

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For I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." But then the author notes in v. 7 how Isaiah is spared of death after the angel touches his mouth with an ember from the altar and cleanses him of sin.

[22] See Gen. 28, where Jacob's call to be the ancestor of a covenant people is beautifully represented by a dream that leads to his naming of the vision site as *Bethel*—"house of God." One tends to miss out the whole objective of this graphic portrayal of a stairway, connecting heaven and earth like a bridge, and of angels "ascending and descending" on it, when one fails to notice the most important detail in the dream in v.13: *wehinneh Yhwh nizzab 'alaw*—"And behold, there was the Lord standing beside him (i.e., Jacob)…" and introducing himself to the ancestor who would later be named Israel: *'ani Yhwh 'Elohei 'Abraham 'abika wE'lohei Yizchaq*—"I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac…"

but rather about "the Word of the Lord" being revealed to him the way it used to be revealed to Moses through a direct communication. Therefore, the author would say later in 1 Sam 3:20 that "All Israel from Dan to Beersheba came to know…" *ki ne'eman shemu'el lenabi' laYahwh* "…that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord." That line is again an obvious echo of Num 12:7, where Aaron and Miriam, after questioning the prophetic authority of Moses, are being told by Yahweh: "Throughout my house he (i.e., Moses) is trustworthy (*ne'eman*)."

Hananel Shaphira characterizes Samuel as a "representative of the entire prophetic legacy." He says, "the narrator uses the narrative's peculiarities to validate the essence of prophecy and the prophetic role" and that "the peculiarities in Samuel's call narrative converge to form a web of allusions to another biblical narrative relating to prophets and their credibility, namely Num 12." Furthermore, he says, "The reader of 1 Sam 3 is supposed to be puzzled by the events, just like Samuel himself was, since it is indeed a puzzle, a riddle—the very manner by which the Lord speaks with his prophets, as implied by the description of Moses' audience with God in Num 12: "*Not so* with my servant Moses ... with *him* (as against the other prophets) I speak ... clearly, *not in riddles*" (vv. 7–8.12).[23]

The mimetic irony in 1 Sam 3, which we earlier spoke about, is actually established already in the two chapters that preceded it. There is a sharp contrast between the corrupt and abusive sons of Eli on the one hand, who served as priests in the temple, and Samuel the son of Hannah on the other hand, who also "served in the presence of the Lord" (1 Sam 3:1), but who "was growing in stature and in worth in the estimation of the Lord and the people" (1 Sam 2:26). The portrayal of

[23] Hananel Shaphira, "Subversion through Allusion in Samuel's Call to Prophecy (1 Sam 3)," *Vetus Testamentum* 74 (2024): 4. Shaphira says, "By presenting Samuel's prophecy in a way that conforms to the description in Num. 12 of non-Mosaic prophecy, the narrator lends credibility to his own narrative and reinforces Samuel's reliability. Rather than directly quarreling with Num. 12, which asserts that only Moses is a credible prophet, the author of 1 Sam. 3 accepts this text and uses it subversively. If you cannot beat them, join them." Ibid., 15.

Samuel "lying in the temple where the ark of God was kept at a time when the lamp of God had not yet been extinguished," (1 Sam 3:3) and hearing God calling his name for the first time in v. 4, "Samuel, Samuel," and answering *Hinneni!* "Here I am!" cannot but make one think of Moses before the burning bush and hearing his name called out by God for the first time, "Moses, Moses," and answering *Hinneni!* "Here I am!" (Exod 3:4)

Appropriating 1 Samuel 3:9

With due indulgence, allow me now to share some thoughts on my personal appropriation of 1 Sam 3:9 in my own life and ministry.

I was also an innocent four-year-old boy the first time I learned from our parish catechist that there was a way of finding out whether or not God was present inside the Church. Namely, by checking if the vigil lamp next to the tabernacle at the altar was on fire. I remember how the very awareness of God's presence had filled me with childlike excitement. It motivated me every day to drop by our parish Church twice a day during school days, from home on my way to school, and from school on my way back home. I did not even know yet how to pray. But I found myself coming back daily. Inside me, I felt satisfied just seeing the vigil lamp burning. This was long before I learned in my theological studies that the perpetual vigil lamp in our Churches was actually a remnant of the perpetual fire that was supposed to be kept burning by the priests in the meeting tent and later in the temple that housed the ark of the covenant.[24]

Fast forward, fifty-four years later, I became bishop of Kalookan in a serious time of crisis for countless families in our diocese—the brutal war of the former president against illegal drugs. From 2017 on, I found myself waking up at past midnight almost every day to

[24] See Exod. 27:20: "You shall command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of crushed olives, to be used for the light, so that you may keep the lamps burning always"; and Lev. 6:5: "The fire on the altar is to be kept burning; it must not go out…" And in v. 6: "The fire is to be kept burning continuously on the altar; it must not go out."

check on the messages on my phone. My fault, because I deliberately turned on its ringing tone to check on messages that came in every day from a group of journalists who jokingly referred to themselves as the "nightcrawlers". My fault again because I had made a deal with them. I had asked them, in exchange for free coffee, to send me names and photos of drug suspects who were victims of EJK, especially those killed in the cities of Caloocan, Malabon, and Navotas.

On one of those nights, my phone did not stop beeping from one until three in the early morning, registering new notifications about yet new victims. That was the night when Kian de los Santos was killed. After looking at the photos of one victim whose brains had been blasted by several gunshots, and images of his mother in a state of hysteria, I felt my guts turning over. Since I could not sleep anymore, I found myself inside my oratory, before the Blessed Sacrament, where I have my daily "Coffee with Jesus" first thing in the morning. This time, it was just past midnight. I fixed my gaze on the vigil lamp, and as I closed my eyes, the little flicker of light became a burning bush in my imagination. The "fire blazing in my heart, imprisoned in my bones", as the prophet Jeremiah once described it, was now speaking to me as it did to Moses, to Samuel, and to later prophets like Amos and Isaiah. I found myself scribbling what I entitled "A Prophetic Oracle Against Murderers", following the literary form of the oracles of judgment in the prophetic literature. I read it in the San Roque Cathedral for the first time on September 22, 2017.[25]

> *The word of the Lord came to me thus: 'Son of Man, I appointed you as a watchman for my people. Proclaim this oracle from housetops!'*
>
> *Woe to you who call addicts "non-humans" deserving of death. Who gave you the right to pass judgment on people who are sick? You claim to care about the future of young people in this country. What future awaits them if they end up dead on a street alley after a "legitimate police operation"?*

[25] This homily was also later on published. See, Pablo Virgilio David, "A Prophetic Oracle against Murderers," *Rappler*, accessed July 16, 2019, http://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/209840-prophetic-oracle-murderers-bishop-pablo-david.

Woe to you who arrest and detain "drug suspects" without charges and extort ransom money from them and their relatives! You call yourselves "law enforcers" but have no regard for the law! You break into homes without search warrants; you arrest suspects without arrest warrants; you force "drug suspects" to work as assets and force them to point at other suspects for summary execution!

Woe to you who drive the poor victims of drugs more deeply into poverty and misery! You who neither respect human rights nor human lives. You who trample on people's dignity because they are poor and are unable to defend themselves! You who eliminate addicts like chickens infected with avian flu—do you not care at all that your victims have wives who are driven into despair and hopelessness, and children who end up like stray dogs and cats in the streets, sniffing solvents to forget their hunger?

Woe to you who indiscriminately submit names of alleged "drug suspects" to the police, or casually drop their names in drop boxes, knowing that the "drug watch list" is also used as a "kill list"? Do you even realize that in doing so, you are practically pronouncing the death sentence of a fellow human being? Listen! The voice that cries, "Where is your brother?" now confronts you and asks, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out from the ground!" (Genesis 4:10)

Woe to you who claim to be waging a war against illegal drugs but are killing its victims instead of saving them! You who order law enforcers to murder when their mandate is to protect the citizens and defend their right to a safe and secure environment. Woe to you who blindly follow unjust and unlawful orders! You who blindly obey the command to "kill drug suspects if they resist arrest!" Woe to you who plant evidence in order to justify murder!

Woe to you who pretend to care about the lives of your victims! You even bother to bring them to hospitals only to have them declared "dead on arrival"! Do you even get to sleep at night after writing a false police report, claiming that they had fought back when God knows they did not? Do you not have wives and children yourselves?

Woe to you, funeral handlers who are in cahoots with the murderers. You shamelessly arrive at the crime scenes, way ahead of the police! You who circle around human carcasses like vultures, preying on their families while they are still in a state of shock, charging nonrefundable down-payments and exorbitant funeral services! You low creatures who take advantage of the helplessness of the widowed wives and orphaned children of the victims, pushing them more deeply into the mire of debts, just so they could give their dead a decent burial.

Woe to you who just stand by and watch while the masked killers kill their targets in broad daylight! You who dismiss the murder quickly with a toxic whisper: "Must be another drug suspect!" You stare at them sprawled on cold pavement and note the

brains spilling out of their shattered skulls. You stall the traffic by slowing down your vehicle to take a close look, shaking your heads as you go your way. "It's just another one of those low lives anyway," you reason within yourself. It's just one criminal less, one of those elements your family is being "protected from." You do not even bother to cover the cadaver with a blanket or some sheets of newspaper. How long has it been since your consciences died?

Woe to you who would give "due process" to influential people who flood the country with billion-pesos worth of illegal drugs, you rotten vermins who allow tons of shabu to pass through the green lanes of the Bureau of Customs, you who just sneer at your accusers because you have all the means to enjoy legal protection and remedy! Are not the poor who are hunted like rabid dogs and cats in the slums--citizens of this country as well? Are they not entitled to due process because they are poor?

Woe to you who cover your faces with bonnets, ski masks, or helmets, and murder drug suspects like chickens! You who wrap up your victims in plastic bags and packaging tapes and leave them still gasping for their last breath. You who play god and even bother to hang on your victims' necks what you killed them for, not minding at all that you have acted as accuser, judge, and executioner--rolled into one? God knows who you are!

Woe to you, law enforcers who pretend not to know who these serial-killing death squads are! They pass by your police stations, walk through narrow alleys in big groups, drive vehicles with no plate numbers, abduct and murder "drug suspects". But you neither see them nor apprehend them; you neither pursue them nor engage them in a firefight; you neither investigate nor bring to a resolution any of the deaths resulting from their criminal operations. How will these criminals be caught if the ones who should be pursuing them are partners in crime?

Woe to you, barangay captains who are in collusion with killers! You who turn off street lamps and CCTV cameras on cue, except when the killers have failed to "coordinate" properly with you! How often have the families of your constituents run to you asking for CCTV footages and you've given the standard reply, "CCTV not functioning?"

Woe to you, boatmen who, for a fee, drop the corpses of victims into the North Harbor with weights tied around their bodies so as to keep them from floating? You who have no qualms about literally following orders to "fatten the fish of Manila Bay"? How can your consciences give you sleep at all?

Woe to you who call yourselves "Christians" but do not care an iota about the victims of extrajudicial killings, or even about priests who are being murdered. You who can still afford to laugh even when your faith is trampled upon, and your God

is called stupid! You blind fools!! You come to Church and hear the Word of God; you line up for communion to receive the Lamb of God who died for sinners, but you tolerate the murder of those whom he died for! Woe to you who call yourselves "shepherds" but allow your sheep to be slaughtered.

Therefore, because your crimes have reached the highest heavens, and the cries of the bereaved families of victims have been heard on the throne of Mercy, because you have been weighed and have been found wanting, your names will be written on the walls of the deepest recesses of the underworld. You will stumble on the very swords you have used as weapons to bully the poor with. Your guilt will be borne by your children and your children's children down to the fourth generation![26]

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About the Author. **Pablo Virgilio Siongco Cardinal David, D.D.,** is the bishop of the Diocese of Kalookan and a distinguished biblical scholar. He earned his doctorate in 1991 from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, focusing on the Book of Daniel. He later taught at the Loyola School of Theology and the Mother of Good Counsel Seminary. He served multiple terms on the Board of Trustees of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP), including as Vice-President. In the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

[26] As of printing, the former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte is under the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, the Netherlands, with charges of crimes against humanity for his bloody drug war. With a request from the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), an intergovernmental organization that facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control, Duterte was surrendered by the Philippine government under Ferdinand R. Marcos on March 11, 2025. While Duterte announced his unilateral withdrawal of the Philippines from the ICC on March 15 2018, it only took effect on March 19, 2019. The ICC retains jurisdiction over crimes committed while the Philippines was a party from November 1, 2011 to March 16, 2019 so the charge against Duterte was still covered when the country was a signatory to the Rome Statute. The Rome Statute is the international treaty which established the ICC. The Philippines signed the Rome Statute in 2000 during the presidency of Joseph Ejercito Estrada. It was finally ratified by the Philippine senate under the leadership of President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III in 2011. For more information, see "Situation in the Philippines: Rodrigo Roa Duterte in ICC custody," *International Criminal Court*, https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-philippines-rodrigo-roa-duterte-icc-custody.

(CBCP), he has held key roles and has been President since 2021. A fierce human rights advocate, he opposed President Duterte's drug war, facing but overcoming trumped-up charges. For his defense of the poor, he received Ateneo de Manila University's *Bukas-Palad* Award in 2019. As a pastor and practical theologian, he authored the Juan/Juana theology series. In February 2024, he was elected as Vice-President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. David participated in the final meeting of the Synod on Synodality in October 2024, where the Synod of Bishops elected him as a member of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat. On December 7, 2024, Pope Francis made him a cardinal, and on January 12, 2025, the Pope also appointed him a member of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith.

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MICHAL'S LEGACY: BRIDGING BIBLICAL NARRATIVES WITH ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN

Rodel D. Magin, O.S.A.

Abstract. This article explores biblical narratives, focusing specifically on Michal's story from the books of Samuel (1 Sam 14:19, 18:20-28, 19:11-17, 25:44, 2 Sam 3:12-16, and 6:16-23), the daughter of King Saul who became the wife of David, to shed light on women's challenges. Through narrative analysis and feminist interpretation, it highlights the relevance of Michal's story in addressing contemporary societal issues. By drawing insights from these narratives, the study advocates for societal transformation and gender equality, emphasizing the urgent need for action to alleviate the struggles faced by women. As the Church upholds the dignity of every individual, regardless of their attributes, this article aims to foster a deeper appreciation for the invaluable contributions of women. In the words of Pope Francis, they serve as pillars in our communities, often laboring silently yet steadfastly, nurturing and sustaining life.[1]

Keywords: Feminism, Michal, Narrative Criticism

[1] See Pope Francis, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 66.

Introduction

The name Michal occurs seventeen times in the Bible, mostly in the books of Samuel.[2] She appears ten times as the daughter of Saul[3] and two times as the wife of David.[4] Her appearance seemingly suggests her significant role in the early Israelite monarchy. Whatever her role may be, Michal's context, just like any woman in the Old Testament period was undeniably dominated and controlled by men. In fact, the recurring theme of the Books of Samuel, where Michal's stories are embedded, is about political power manifested through marriage and sexual access, which is far and wide acceptable in the patriarchal society of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.[5]

Numerous studies have already been undertaken about Michal. From historical-critical studies that delve into the historical reconstruction of the person of Michal,[6] to literary-theological-cultural studies that explore the effects of Michal on the readers of the Bible.[7] In these studies, Michal has always been put in relation to

[2] See 1 Sam. 14:49; 18:20, 27–28; 19:11–13; 19:17; 25:44; 2 Sam. 3:13–14; 6:16, 20–21, 23; and 1 Chr. 15:29.

[3] See 1 Sam. 14:49; 18:20, 27–28; 2 Sam 3: 14; 6:16, 20, 23; and 1 Chr. 15:29.

[4] See 1 Sam. 19:11; 2 Sam. 3:13.

[5] See J. Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 62 (2000): 416–417.

[6] See A. Anderson, 2 *Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 11 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989); W. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990); P. Miscall, 1 *Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); K. McCarter, I *Samuel*, Anchor Bible 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980); K. McCarter, II *Samuel*, Anchor Bible 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

[7] See C. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model of Women in Early Israel?" CBQ 43 (1981): 14–29; P. Hiebert, "'Whence Shall Help Come to Me? The Biblical Widow,'" in P. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 125–41; N. Jay, "Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman," in C. Atkinson, et al., eds., *Immaculate and Powerful:*

David and the monarchy. During the past decades, moreover, gender studies and feminist criticism contribute to a more holistic approach to Michal studies.[8] While drawing on insights from these scholars, this article discusses the relevance and implications of Michal's character for contemporary Philippine society. It analyzes Michal's character in the books of Samuel using narrative criticism, focusing on key elements such as character, point of view, and plot.[9] Additionally, applying feminist hermeneutical principles[10]—including a hermeneutics of experience, domination and social location, suspicion, critical evaluation, creative imagination, remembering and reconstruction, and transformative action for change—allows for a deeper understanding

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The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality, Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 283–309.

[8] See D. J. A. Clines and T. C. Eskenazi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 119 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1991); J. C. Exum, "Michal: The Whole Story," in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press, 1993); D. Bodi, *The Michal Affair: From Zimri-Lim to the Rabbis* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2005); T. Ilan, "A Secular, Jewish, Feminist Look at the Bible," in S. Schroer and S. Bietenhard, eds., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation,* JSOT Sup 374 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 94–102.

[9] See R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible,* JSOT 70 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989); A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative,* Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); D. M. Gunn, "Narrative Criticism," in S. R. Haynes and S. L. McKenzie, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 175.

[10] See M. Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); H. A. Choi and K. P. Darr, eds., *Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); A. Y. Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* Biblical Scholarship in North America 10 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); E. S. Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon press, 1992).

of how Michal's story can inform contemporary Filipino society, a perspective worth exploring.

This article argues that the biblical portrayal of Michal, when analyzed through narrative criticism and feminist hermeneutics, reveals a pattern of manipulation and victimization of women within patriarchal structures, a pattern that resonates with contemporary challenges faced by women, particularly in the Philippines, highlighting the need for societal transformation and gender equality.

The Biblical Michal

We begin by examining Michal's character as she appears in various passages in the books of Samuel, so we can gain insight into her attitudes, roles, and values.[11] Michal's story is found in the following six texts within the books of Samuel: a) 1 Sam 14:19; b) 18:20-28; c) 19:11-17; d) 25:44; e) 2 Sam 3:12-16; and f) 6:16-23. We will now explore these texts individually and uncover the liberative aspects of Michal's character.

1 Sam 14:49

Our first text, 1 Sam 14:49, introduces the family of Saul. The immediate literary context, which begins in v. 47 and ends in v. 52, describes Saul's ongoing wars against the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zobahites, Amalekites, and Philistines. In v. 48, the text highlights how Saul rescues the Israelites from those who plundered them.

The passage also lists Saul's three sons. The first is Jonathan, whose heroic deeds are recounted on 1 Sam 13:3-4, 16; 14:1-18, 24-30, 43-45, revealing his strength and resolve, traits he shares with his father, Saul. Jonathan was killed in a battle against the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam 31:2, 6; 1 Chr 10:2; 2 Sam 21:12-14) and was buried by the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam 31:11-13). Another son, Ishvi, is mentioned

[11] Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical texts will be taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

nowhere else in the Bible except here, leading to conjecture, based on 1 Sam 31:2, that Ishvi and Abinadab might be the same person. Finally, Malchishua, a third son, is mentioned in 1 Sam 31:2, 1 Chr 8:33; 9:39; and 10:2—all about the battles involving their father Saul.

Additionally, the text lists Saul's two daughters: Merab and Michal. Merab was betrothed to David by Saul in 1 Sam 18:17-18 but was given to Adriel as a wife in 1 Sam 18:19. Michal became David's wife in 1 Sam 18:27 and later the wife of Paltiel in 1 Sam 25:44. Thus, this verse enumerates Saul's children: Jonathan, Ishvi, Malchishua, Merab, and Michal. The Bible provides no further information about the mother of these children, including Michal.

1 Sam 18:20-28

After being introduced as the younger daughter of Saul, Michal is revealed on Sam 18:20-28 to be in love with David. This scene is part of the larger narrative in 1 Sam 18, which is composed of five distinct episodes:[12]

a) Jonathan's covenant with David in vv. 1-5;

b) Saul's attempt to kill David in vv. 6-16;

c) Saul's offer of Merab to David in vv. 17-19;

d) Michal marries David in vv. 20-28; and

e) David's success and Saul's fear in vv. 29-30.

Michal's character is central to the fourth episode, where she is described as Saul's daughter who loved David (v. 20). Saul is pleased by Michal's love for David (v. 20). At the end of the episode, the narrator again highlights Michal's love for David (v. 28), which becomes one of the reasons for Saul's growing fear of David. Notably, in the previous episode (vv. 17-19), Saul had initially promised his eldest daughter, Merab, to David. However, when the time came for Merab to be

[12] See W. Brueggemann, "Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality in 1 Samuel 18," *CBQ* 55 (1983): 226.

given to David, she was instead given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife (v. 19).

Walter Brueggemann argues that Michal's love, mentioned twice in this episode (v. 20, v. 28), shapes the entire chapter.[13] It is the only instance in the Bible where a woman is explicitly described as loving a man. Michal's love (**'āhēb**) stems from her emotions, a term often used to describe relationships between human beings (e.g., the love of a father for his son in Gen 22:2; Jacob and Joseph in Gen 37:3; Samson and Delilah in Judg 14:16; 16:15; Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi in Ruth 4:15; Elkanah and his wife Hannah in 1 Sam 1:5; Rebekah and her son Jacob in Gen 25:28, etc.). The term reappears in v. 22, where Saul's servants are instructed to tell David, "See, the king is delighted with you, and all his servants love you; now then, become the king's son-in-law."[14]

In 1 Sam 18:20, the word "love", as D. Bodi suggests, may carry a political overtone, representing political loyalty, partisanship, or even a diplomatic or commercial contract.[15] This political dimension is evident earlier in the narrative when Jonathan made a covenant with David in verse 3: "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul," and in verse 16, where "all Israel and Judah loved David; for it was he who marched out and came in leading them." Thus, David becomes a dangerous political rival to Saul (cf. 1

[13] See Brueggemann, "Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality," 231.

[14] See Wallis, "'āhēb," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 101–18.

[15] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 13. The political connotation of the term 'love' is well attested both in the Bible and in ancient Near Eastern literature. Haldar ("'āhēb," TDOT 1: 101) notes:

"The Amarna letters state that princes 'love' each other, that the vassals 'love' the pharaoh and that the pharaoh 'loves' the subjects, and that the subjects should 'love' their king. This love includes primarily loyalty, fidelity, and obedience."

Sam 18:15, 28). Bodi thinks that Saul intends to use Michal's love for David as a means to ensnare David.[16] He notes:

> Michal's tragic love for David is born in the shadow of the political meaning of the term "love." Despite the rising tensions and occasional outright animosity between the two men, Saul's daughter loves her father's rival. The love Michal feels will be sacrificed by her father, who exploits it to eliminate his political adversary. The happiness of his daughter is of little consequence to Saul. She is trapped in their power struggle.[17]

Regrettably, there is no mention of David's love for Michal in this narrative.[18] In v. 26, when Saul's servants report Saul's offer for David to marry Michal, David is "well pleased to be the king's son-in-law." It seems that David is primarily interested in the status of being Saul's son-in-law and will do whatever it takes to achieve this. However, what he lacks in his relationship with Michal is "love."[19]

1 Sam 19:11-17

This passage illustrates how Michal expresses her love for David. The pericope can be seen as part of the episode in which Saul attempts to kill David, described in 1 Sam 19. In this chapter, Saul openly announces his intent to kill David to "his son Jonathan and to all his servants" (v.1). The preceding narrative outlines Saul's indirect attempts to kill David: first, by the hand of the Philistines (1 Sam 18:17; 21; 25), and second, through marrying Michal to David (1 Sam 18:20).[20] The main character in this scene is Michal, who by this time is already

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[16] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 13.

[17] Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 12.

[18] L. Klein, "Michal, the Barren Wife," in *Samuel and Kings: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. A. Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 37.

[19] Lawton, "1 Samuel 18," 425.

[20] D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 2007), 489–526. He further outlines 1 Sam. 19 as follows:

married to David. To understand Michal's significant role in this scene, the episode may be outlined as follows:[21]

a. Michal helps David to escape (vv. 11-13)

After learning that David has returned home, Saul sends messengers to watch over him and kill him in the morning. This marks Saul's third attempt to kill David, but this time, Michal intervenes. She saves her husband's life by letting him down through a window (v. 12, cf. Josh 2:15). J. Cheryl Exum suggests that Michal's actions are an illustration of her love for David.[22] A. Laffy believes that Michal used her prudence, courage, and cunning to save David from Saul's pursuit and certain death. [23]

Verse 13 shows how Michal uses a teraphim to buy time for David's escape.[24] She "laid it on the bed, put a net of goats' hair on its head,

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Scene 1: "Saul Orders That David Be Killed" (vv. 1–7) illustrates the relation of David and Saul which is now in crisis. Jonathan remains loyal to David by protecting him from his father's fatal order. Hence, he serves as intermediary between David and Saul.

Scene 2: "David's Victory Over the Philistines" (v. 8) narrates David's war against the Philistines.

Scene 3: "Saul's Second Attack on David" (vv. 9–10) records Saul's second attempt at stabbing David. The first attempt is recorded in 18:10–11. Unlike in 18:10-11, 19:10 uses the verbs *nās* and *wayyimmālēt* (fled and escaped) which indicate that David would now be cautious of his father-in-law's cruel intention of him.

Scene 4: "David Escapes from Saul" (vv. 11–24) may be taken as a direct sequel of David's *nās* and *wayyimmālēt* in v. 10.

[21] See D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel,* 493–98.

[22] See J. C. Exum, "Michal at the Window, Michal in the Movies," in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, ed. J. C. Exum (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996), 57.

[23] See A. Laffy, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 109–10.

[24] See H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 166.

and covered it with clothes" (v. 13). Bodi interprets this act as that of a devoted wife who, in her commitment to her husband,[25] renounces her allegiance to her father. Michal is portrayed as a courageous and resourceful woman willing to take risks to ensure David's safety.[26]

b. Michal deceives Saul (vv. 14-17)

For the second time, Saul sends messengers with the specific instruction to kill David in the morning (v. 11). Michal tells the messengers that David is sick (v. 14). Saul, assuming David is resting in bed, instructs his messengers to find him, but they instead discover the teraphim. Realizing that his daughter has deceived him, Saul, for the first time, speaks directly to Michal in v. 17: 'Why have you deceived me like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?' Michal's deception, aided by the teraphim, has clearly offended Saul.[27]

I believe that Michal can be seen as a forceful initiator of action in 1 Sam 19:11-17. She demonstrates her love for David through her words and actions during a critical moment when her beloved's life is threatened by her father. Michal is portrayed as an energetic and cunning wife who comes to her husband's aid. David Clines remarks: "Michal takes an utterly reckless action, breaking family loyalties and risking Saul's unpredictable anger, just because she is in love... she is loyal to David."[28] John Lees adds: "Michal was evidently a woman of unusual strength of mind and decisiveness of character. She manifested

[25] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 26.

[26] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 26. Bodi also conjectures that the use of these household idols might indicate that the house of Saul was implicated in idolatry.

[27] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 27–30. Bodi puts in the striking resemblance to the *teraphim* episode between Laban and Rachel in Gen. 31:32. Both Rachel and Michal were the youngest daughters; both Laban and Saul were tricked; both events occurred during flight. This allusion may foreshadow a fatality shared by Rachel and Michal—Rachel having become the object of Jacob's unwitting curse because of theft. See also R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 120.

[28] D. J. A. Clines, "The Story of Michal, Wife of David, in its Sequential Unfolding," in *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative*

her love in an age when it was almost unheard of for a woman to take the initiative in such matters. For the sake of the man she loved, she braved her father's wrath and risked her own life."[29] In summary, Michal's love drives her to choose her husband over her father, not out of hatred for Saul, but out of a desire to save David from her father's selfish motivations.

1 Sam 25:44

Although Michal betrays her father by helping David escape, she remains obedient to him. Verse 44, at the end of 1 Sam 25, recounts that Saul gave Michal to Palti, a man from Gallim in the northern part of Israel (cf. Isa 10:30).[30] Such a decision, according to Bodi, appears to be politically motivated.[31] Saul likely recognized that David's political influence had grown through his marriages to Abigail and Ahinoam. Thus, Michal is seemingly used as a pawn in the political struggle between David and Saul, becoming a victim of her father's ambition to bolster his own position.[32] Unfortunately, Michal remains silent in this text, as does her new husband, Palti.[33]

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*Interpretation,*eds., D. J. A. Clines and T. C. Eskenazi, JSOTSup 119 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1991), 131.

[29] J. Lees, "Michal," *BibleWorks*, Version 8 (2009).

[30] See J. Levenson and B. Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," JBL 99 (1980): 507–18. After recounting the story of David and Nabal in vv. 1–39, the narrator presents an account of David's wives in vv. 40–44—the immediate context of v. 44. David takes Abigail as his wife, along with Ahinoam of Jezreel (cf. 2 Sam. 3:2–5; 5:13–16). By marrying both, David strengthens his political influence in Israel.

[31] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 34.

[32] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 34.

[33] The name Paltiel is from Hebrew *palat-el* which literally means "because God (*El*)." The Rabbis attest that Paltiel was saved (*niflat*) from sin, and did not touch Michal. A legend was told that "Paltiel placed his sword between them and said: 'Whoever engages in this [intercourse] shall be stabbed by this sword.'" Paltiel overcame his sexual urge to such an extent that he was regarded as a woman,

M. L. del Mastro suggests that Palti, the son of Laish, was a kind man who treated Michal with great reverence, as though she were a "High Queen."[34] He is said to have spoiled and treated her "like a cross between a beloved child and a goddess."[35] Despite living together as a married couple, the Midrash reports that they did not engage in intercourse because Michal remained faithful to David.[36] Here we can describe Michal as an obedient woman, showing her capacity to comply with her father's decisions despite the circumstances.

2 Sam 3:12-16

This scene seems to depict a tense love triangle involving Michal, David, and Paltiel. The context is Abner's decision to ally with David, prompting him to send messengers to David with the proposal. In verse 13, David agrees to make a covenant with Abner, but on one condition: that Abner bring 'Michal, daughter of Saul' with him. The literary structure of this passage highlights Michal's importance to David. Bodi notes that the verse forms a chiasmus, with a single element at the center, emphasizing that this is the focal point of the speech.[37] David says to Abner, "Good; I will make a covenant with you; but one thing I require of you; that is,

A *lēʾmōr lōʾ-tirʾê ʾet-pānay*

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and not a man, as is learned in 2 Sam. 3:16: "*Ishah* [that could be understood either as "her husband" or "a woman"] walked with her"—he became for her as a woman. Proverbs 31:29 alludes the phrase 'Woman of Valor' to Paltiel. "[Many women have done well,] but you surpass them all" (BT *Sanhedrin* 19b–20a). See T. Kadari, "Michal, daughter of Saul: Midrash and Aggadah," *Jewish Women's Archive*, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/michal-daughter-of-saul-midrash-and-aggadah (accessed 11 March 2024).

[34] See M. L del Mastro, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Castle Books, 2004), 313.

[35] See M. L. del Mastro, *All the Women of the Bible,* 313.

[36] See Tamar Kadari, "Michal, daughter of Saul: Midrash and Aggadah."

[37] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 34.

B *kî ʾim-lipnê hĕbîʾăkā*

C *ʾēt mîkal bat-šāʾûl*

B′ *bəbōʾăkā*

A′ *lirʾôt ʾet-pānāy*

The repetition of key phrases, *ʾet-pānay* in A and A', and *ăkā* in B and B', underscores David's focus on Michal. Notably, David refers to her as "daughter of Saul" when speaking to Abner, which Clines interprets as reducing Michal to a mere bargaining chip in a business arrangement between David and Abner.[38] In v. 14, David sends messengers to Ishbaal, demanding, "Give me my wife Michal." The use of "my wife" here reflects a more emotive tone. While David acknowledges Michal as his wife, he simultaneously implies that Ishbaal bears responsibility for her current situation with Paltiel (v. 15).

A very emotional Paltiel enters the scene in v. 16. When Ishbaal took Michal from him, Paltiel followed her, "weeping as he walked behind her all the way to Bahurim." J. Kessler suggests that Paltiel was deeply attached to Michal,[39] to the point of experiencing painful humiliation, especially when Abner sarcastically ordered him, "Go back home!" His profound love for Michal is evident as he never harmed her and instead followed her in tears when Abner took Michal from him to return her to David.[40]

Despite Paltiel's love, Michal, who was deeply in love with David, chose to return to him. Though vv. 12-16 do not detail her feelings or perspective, it can be inferred that her decision to follow Ishbaal signifies her enduring love for David over Paltiel. By choosing David, Michal acknowledges that he is still her husband, despite the selfishness

[38] Clines, "The Story of Michal, Wife of David, in Its Sequential Unfolding," 131ff.

[39] See Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel," 416–17.

[40] See Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics, 314.

of his demand. Nonetheless, in this particular passage, Michal is portrayed as a woman whose love for her husband surpasses her obedience to her father. Even though David's motives (vv. 13-14) may have dehumanized her, serving his path to the throne, Michal remains loyal to him. [41]

2 Sam 6:16-23

This final story presents yet another image of Michal. While in the previous passages, she is portrayed as a loving and loyal wife, this scene portrays her as valorous and courageous, confidently correcting her husband with a sarcastic tone. The text in 2 Sam 6:16-23 is part of the larger narrative in vv. 1-23, which tells the story of David transferring the Ark to Jerusalem.[42] Verse 16 introduces Michal, identified as the daughter of Saul, watching the procession from a window (***nšəqəpâ bəʿad haḥallôn***). She observes King David "leaping and dancing before the Lord (***lipnê yhwh***)." Her reaction is immediate: "She despised him in her heart (***wttibez lô bəlibbāh***)." The text does not explicitly state why she despised him, but while David is celebrating, Michal seems to be in stark contrast, entering the scene as a keen observer. [43]

Michal's "looking out of the window" can be interpreted in two ways. First, according to Bodi, the expression ***bəʿad haḥallôn***, which also appears in 1 Sam 19:12 (cf. 1 Chr 15:29), is "comparable to other openings like the door, or the opening of the womb. The window represents a frontier between two spaces: the obscure and the luminous, the interior and the exterior, the included and the excluded. …this symbolizes the alternative between life and death."[44] At this point in her life, Michal may have already foreseen what her life would be like

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[41] See Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel,* 259; see also Peterson, *First and Second Samuel,* 150.

[42] See Bowman, "The Fortune of King David/The Fate of Queen Michal," 113.

[43] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 51.

[44] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 51.

with the new king of Israel as her husband. Second, Michal's 'looking out of the window' might evoke memories of Sisera's mother, who waited in vain for her son, who died in battle (Judg 5:28).[45] She became a 'son-less mother,' neglected by those who did not inform her of her son's fate. Similarly, Michal at the window appears as a "practically husbandless, ever-waiting, and neglected wife." [46]

In v. 20, Michal appears cold toward David. Unlike the warm reception David receives from the people, he is met with sarcasm at home. Michal, once again identified as the daughter of Saul, addresses David with scorn: "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" Her statement seems to criticize David's behavior as inappropriate. Perhaps Michal was deeply concerned about David's identity as the newly anointed king of Israel (2 Sam 5:1-25), or perhaps her relationship with David had brought her little joy.

If her concern was indeed about David's identity, there seems to be an issue of honor and shame in this confrontation (vv. 20-22). To Michal, David, as king, should preserve his "honor." Now that he is the king of Israel, Michal likely wanted to ensure that propriety was maintained. Her courage in correcting the king is impressive. However, on one hand, for David, what Michal viewed as a contemptible act was, in fact, an act of humble acceptance of his role as king of Israel in service to Yahweh (vv. 21-22).[47] On the other hand, if her relationship

[45] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 53.

[46] See Clines, "The Story of Michal: Wife of David, in its Sequential Unfolding," 138. He argues that Michal's disgust has a sexual overtone. Clines writes, "She (Michal) cannot bear to see a man she has loved to flaunt himself as sexually available—presumably, that is, to anyone but her. His self-exposure earns the acclaim of the bystanders, but is in fact a humiliation to him, if only he could recognize the fact; and it is a humiliation to her as well, because it proclaims David's indifference in matters of sexual loyalty."

[47] See Clines, "The Story of Michal: Wife of David, in Its Sequential Unfolding," 138. However, Bodi states, "Whatever love Michal once felt for

with David brought her little or no joy, this could explain the narrator's conclusion in v. 23: "And Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death."[48]

Synthesis: Michal's Character Development

Love, Loyalty, Betrayal, and Tragedy

We have explored that Michal's story, which begins in 1 Sam 14:49 with her introduction as one of Saul's daughters, unfolds to us a narrative of love, loyalty, betrayal, and, ultimately, tragedy. As presented above, she falls in love with David, a love recognized by her father, Saul, in 1 Sam 18:20-28. This love compels her to save David's life in 1 Sam 19:11-17, even going so far as to take the reckless step of aiding his escape, thereby risking Saul's unpredictable wrath. Despite being given to another man, Palti, by her father in 1 Sam 25:44, Michal is eventually returned to David in 2 Sam 3:12-16, reaffirming her loyalty to him—a central theme of her story. [49] However, her love seems to be manipulated for political gain by the men around her. While Michal's motivations are personal, Saul and David, unfortunately, are driven by ambition. Her story concludes on a tragic note: after a confrontation

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him is now replaced by contempt and disdain. As king, David does not fulfill Michal's expectations. Like her father before her, she acts upon her feelings and expresses them to David. Although she could not control the previously portrayed situations in her relationship with David, she does have a measure of control in this one. Her estrangement from David is in part the result of her own actions and on her initiative. This then is her only protest against victimization by the fearful vengeance of her father, by the manipulative opportunism of her husband, and finally by the providential prerogative of her God." See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 55.

[48] Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 88. Exum argues that Michal might possibly refuse to have sexual relations with David. See also J. L. Ska, SJ, *Our Fathers Have Told Us,* Subsidia Biblica 13 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990), 87.

[49] See Clines, "The Story of Michal: Wife of David, in Its Sequential Unfolding," 138.

with David in 2 Sam 6:16-23, she bears no children. Such a consequence seems to be a punishment on the part of Michal.

From a narrative criticism perspective, Michal is described as a loving and loyal woman who ultimately becomes a victim of betrayal. Both her father, Saul, and her husband, David, exploit her love to achieve their own ends—Saul to ensnare David, and David to secure his path to kingship. Despite her virtues, Michal is treated as property, a victim, and a pawn in their ambitions. In the words of T. Ilan, "… Michal is faced with an eternity of frustrated love and sexual abuse. . . . She is trapped within the machinations of the patriarchal system. . . . Michal was forced into a marriage her father chose for her. She was miserable."[50]

Her story reveals the dark side of ambition within a ruling family, where personal relationships are sacrificed for political expediency. The love that initially defined Michal's actions is twisted into a source of suffering, highlighting the destructive power of unchecked ambition and the corrosive effects of hatred within a family. She cannot but embrace the pain and accept the consequences of her actions and decisions. Such an act to embrace the pain has profound value. Brueggemann explains,

> By embracing the pain is meant the full acknowledgement of and experience of pain and the capacity and willingness to make that pain a substantive part of Israel's faith-conversation with its God. Such an act of embrace means to articulate the pain fully, to insist on God's reception of the speech and the pain, and to wait hopefully for God's resolution.[51]

By acknowledging and experiencing her suffering, Michal engages in a powerful act of faith, demanding God's attention and seeking resolution. This act of embracing pain becomes a form of resistance, a testament to her enduring spirit even in the face of betrayal and manipulation.

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[50] Ilan, "A Secular, Jewish, Feminist Look at the Bible," 100–101.

[51] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 25.

This story of Michal revolves around love and ambition, love and hatred, and familial strife resonates in our society. Thus, the biblical Michal continues to exist in our midst where love is exploited, and where its true meaning is tragically lost. They are the "new Michals" who deserve our recognition.

The Contemporary Michal

Using Brueggemann's terminology, many women today have to embrace the pain[52] as they face treatment similar to Michal's—seen as property, victims of betrayal, and considered inferior to men. Surely, this pain that hurts the marginalized, especially women, does not reflect God's heart or design. Hence, Michal's story can stand as a metaphor that should inspire liberation for every woman. Her love and loyalty to her husband serve as a powerful example for every biblical reader, and God's believer as well, to "hope, daring to assert that somehow there is another arrangement of life; somewhere there is a listener who will be more attentive and more powerful and more faithful than the perpetrators of hurt are in their enormous power and in their massive infidelity."[53]

Strikingly, Pope Francis noted that women see things with different eyes than men, asking questions that men often cannot understand.[54] He also called women "the most beautiful thing God has made" and emphasized that "theology cannot be done without this feminine touch."[55] Michal's character is now reflected in the lives of the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), and of women who seek justice and long for fidelity. Let us now hear some of their stories and see how they connect with the biblical Michal.

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[52] Emphasis mine.

[53] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text,* 51.

[54] See Pope Francis, "Eyes That Are Cleansed by Tears: Meeting with Young People at the University of Santo Tomas," 18 January 2015, *L'Osservatore Romano,* Weekly Edition in English, no. 4 (January 23, 2015): 14–15.

[55] See Pope Francis, "Eyes That Are Cleansed by Tears."

Michal's Sacrifice Reflected in the Lives of OFWs

In 1988, Pope John Paul II wrote that "A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love she gives in return."[56] While these words are beautifully expressed, they are often misunderstood. In the Philippines, where poverty remains a significant issue, many women sacrifice their own needs to support their families, often seeking better opportunities abroad out of love.[57] Unfortunately, this love is sometimes exploited.

A recent study conducted by J. Li highlighted the paradoxical state of affairs for women in the Philippines. While on one hand, Filipino women are among the most advanced globally in terms of academic, professional, political, and legal achievements, it is unfortunate, on the other hand that they face significant challenges, including marital abuse, economic hardships, employment discrimination, exploitation as migrant workers and in prostitution, and displacement due to ongoing conflicts in affected regions.[58]

An encounter with an OFW from Kuwait who expressed her frustration that her husband only contacts her to request for money, treating her more as a source of income than as a partner confirms the foregoing.[59] Despite her frustration towards her husband, her

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[56] John Paul II, *Mulieres Dignitatem,* nos. 29–30.

[57] See Phillip B. Gresham and Marieke Smit, "Gender and Remittances: The Case of the Philippines" (paper submitted to the Oxfam Novib Expert Meeting on Gender and Remittances, The Hague, Netherlands, September 29, 2011); Katleen Keith Capol et al., "Home Alone: Exploring the Emotional Challenges on Children of Overseas Filipino Workers," *Florence: Interdisciplinary Journal of Health and Sustainability* 2, no. 1 (May 24, 2024): 32–36, https://doi.org/10.56183/s3xh5c42.

[58] See J. Li, "A History of Feminism and Gender Equality in the Modern," *EDUCATUM Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no.1 (2022), 42.

[59] Overseas Filipino Worker, interview by author, Iloilo City: Philippines, July 18, 2024.

devotion to providing for her family is unwavering. This woman can be seen as a contemporary Michal in Philippine society—loving, caring, and self-sacrificing. However, her situation highlights the need for our government and society to ensure the promotion of female employment, the integration of gender perspectives into labor laws, and the protection of Filipino women from exploitation. Although Philippine government has sufficient laws and policy on these matters, in the 2021 analysis of Philippine Legislation conducted by International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), much needs to be done in repealing, revising or amending existing laws or formulating new ones so they should continue to be responsive to the lived experiences of women.[60] As Pope Francis emphasized, "the legitimate rights of women must be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity."[61]

Michal's Courage Emulated by Women Seeking Justice

Many men and women today are actively working to overcome violence against women. Violence against them becomes a pervasive problem in the Philippines. Oftentimes, they belong to a structurally weaker position in terms of education, occupation, and economy in a gender-biased social and cultural construction. They experience violence, which may not only be physical in nature, but also sexual, psychological, and economic.

In the Philippines, the recent publication "Six Filipino Women for Justice" offers a profound exploration of resilience and the quest for equity, featuring six Filipino women at the forefront of challenging

[60] See International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), "Strengthening Gender Equality in Law: An Analysis of Philippine Legislation," https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/philippines_-_strengthening_gender_equality.pdf (accessed 28 July 2024), 89.

[61] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 104.

the nation's flawed judicial landscape, especially from 2016-2022 during the administration of former president Rodrigo Duterte.[62] The first story, "Continuing Journey to Freedom," details the unjust persecution of former senator Leila de Lima, who stayed behind bars for years without due process.[63] The second highlights Leni Robredo's dedicated service to the most vulnerable in society without counting the cost.[64] The third covers M. Ressa's relentless pursuit of truth and justice, especially against disinformation and the social media giants, which ultimately earned her a Nobel Peace Prize.[65] The fourth focuses on Risa Hontiveros, a politician and activist, who has been a steadfast opposition figure in public office.[66] The fifth recounts Conchita Carpio-Morales's formidable role in defending justice as a former Supreme Court associate justice and ombudsman.[67] The final story celebrates Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, a feminist theologian and activist who founded the Institute of Women's Studies at St. Scholastica's College.[68]

[62] See Mylene D Hega, Veronica C Alporha, and Meggan S Evangelista, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in the Philippines: Struggles, Advances, and Challenges" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017); Rowena Laguilles-Timog, "Populism, Patriarchy, Protest: Feminist Issues, Responses, and Actors During the First Three Years of the Duterte Administration," *Review of Women's Studies* 30 (December 1, 2020): 87–106; Maria Tanyag, "A Murderous Plague: State Hypermasculinity, COVID-19, and Atrocity Prevention in the Philippines," *Global Responsibility to Protect* 14, no. 4 (2022): 432–61, https://doi.org/10.1163/1875984X-20220014.

[63] See A. D. Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice* (Philippines: San Anselmo Press, 2024), 15–27.

[64] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 28–40.

[65] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 41–55.

[66] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 56–70.

[67] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 71–85.

[68] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 86–100.

These women have raised their voices to emphasize the ongoing subjugation and repression of women in the last eight years.[69] They strongly show how even amidst these prejudices, women are powerful instruments of justice and liberation.

Michal's Longing for Fidelity in the Hearts of Contemporary Wives

Fidelity in marriage is increasingly at risk. Studies show that men are significantly more likely to cheat on their partners, often engaging in infidelity that is more sexual in nature. They report higher rates of extramarital affairs than women.[70] While Filipinos generally disapprove of extramarital relations due to their disruptive impact on marriage, infidelity remains a common cause of marital conflict, causing immense distress both to the wife and to the entire family.[71]

One reason some men become unfaithful is the inability of their wives to bear children. When a husband discovers that his wife cannot give him a biological child, he may seek out another woman to fulfill his desire for a child "of his own flesh."[72]

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[69] See E. Rifareal and L. Bautista, *And She said No! Human Rights, Women's Identities, and Struggles* (Quezon City: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 1990), vii. They wrote that in the Philippines, there is no such thing as women's rights. They believed that "The rights of women must be seen as integral to the corpus of basic and fundamental human rights. The struggle of women should be the struggle of all humanity. The sufferings of women are linked to the sufferings of humanity as a whole."

[70] See A. C. S. Ong, et al., "Gender, Adult Attachment Styles, and the Tendency to Commit Dating Infidelity: A Mixed Methods Study," *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 47, no.1 (2014): 91.

[71] B. Medina, "Issues Relating to Filipino Marriage and Family," in *The Filipino Family: A Spectrum of Views and Issues,* ed. A. Perez (Quezon City: UP Press, 1995), 31.

[72] Conversely, there are also tendencies among infecund men to commit infidelity. See Jeofrey Abalos, "Determinants of Men's Extramarital Sexual

An encounter with Mrs. A, a 57-year-old widow, who was married to Mr. B several years ago.[73] After marriage, they discovered that due to her age, Mrs. A could no longer bear children, so they decided to legally adopt a boy. However, Mr. B was not content with an adopted child; he wanted a child of his own flesh and blood. Secretly, he began an extramarital affair with a young woman he met at work. Several months later, Mrs. A noticed that Mr. B frequently did not come home, and eventually, she discovered that he had impregnated his colleague. "It was a devastating situation. I wanted to kill them both," she recounted.

"I made a decision at last," she continued. "I told him to choose between me and the young woman. If he chose me, he had to cut all ties with her. If he chose her, he had to forget me and our child entirely." Unfortunately, Mr. B chose the young woman.

A few years later, Mr. B was paralyzed in an accident. In the hospital, none of his documents could be approved without the signature of his legal wife. "I didn't know what I felt at that moment," Mrs. A recalled. "I didn't want to go, but something pushed me to visit him in the hospital," she added. "Was it love?" she wondered.

Months later, Mr. B passed away. Mrs. A took care of the bills, burial, and other arrangements. Reflecting on her life as a wife, she realized that despite the heartache, she had managed to stand up and reclaim her dignity as a person and a wife. "He came to me on the first day of our marriage, but left me alone. He returned to me at the end, but then left me again for eternity. So where is God?" she lamented.

Mrs. A represents a modern-day Michal, yearning for a loving and faithful husband who would truly honor her as his wife. Although she could not bear a child of her own, she embraced and loved her adopted child, a decision in line with the legal provisions in the Philippines. However, she was deprived of the opportunity to experience her husband fulfilling the covenantal promise they made during marriage

Experience in the Philippines," *Philippine Population Review* 10 (2011): 51–74, especially 71.

[73] Mrs. A, interview by the author, Iloilo City, Philippines, March 15, 2024.

to be true to each other in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, and to love and honor each other all the days of their lives.[74] The Catholic Church teaches:

> The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: husband and wife, parents and children, relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity, the reality of communion, in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons. The first communion is the one which is established and develops between husband and wife: by virtue of the covenant of married life, the man and woman 'are no longer two but one flesh,' and they are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.[75]

In the New Testament, the spousal love between man and woman is compared to the mystery of Christ and his Church. In the deutero-Pauline epistle to the Ephesians, it is written: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church" (Eph 5:25-30). This deutero-Pauline comparison offers perfect clarity about what is decisive for every wife in the eyes of God. Pope Francis speaks of the "impressive examples of daily heroism" shown by wives in defending and protecting their vulnerable families.[76]

Synthesis: Michal's Enduring Legacy in Contemporary Women

As we have seen, Michal's narrative, far from being a relic of the past, resonates profoundly with some of the experiences of women today. We see echoes of her strength, vulnerability, and resilience in the lives of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), women advocating

[74] See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony,* nos. 62–63.

[75] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), no. 18.

[76] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 212.

for justice, and wives yearning for faithful partnerships. Like Michal, these women navigate complex social and emotional landscapes, often facing manipulation and exploitation within patriarchal structures.

We considered the plight of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who, like the biblical Michal, are often treated as commodities rather than individuals. They endure prolonged separation from their families, facing loneliness, exploitation, and abuse in their pursuit of providing a better life for their loved ones. Just as Michal was used as a political pawn, these women are often exploited for economic gain, their sacrifices mirroring Michal's own forced choices and the profound emotional toll they exact. Their experiences highlight the ongoing struggle against patriarchal systems that prioritize economic or political objectives over the well-being and dignity of women.

We have highlighted how Michal's defiance of her father, Saul, to save David demonstrates her courage and commitment to justice. This same spirit is embodied by women who tirelessly advocate for the oppressed and marginalized in contemporary society. Like Michal, they challenge the status quo, risking personal safety and social ostracism to fight for a more equitable world. Their unwavering pursuit of justice echoes Michal's own, a courage born of deep conviction and a desire for a world free from oppression.

It is interesting to note that Michal's longing for a genuine connection with David, despite his political ambitions and personal failings, speaks to the universal desire for faithful and loving partnerships. This longing is mirrored in the lives of wives who yearn for husbands who are both present and committed. Like Michal, they navigate the complexities of relationships, often facing betrayal, neglect, or emotional distance. Their stories remind us that the struggle for mutual respect and affection within intimate relationships remains a poignant and enduring aspect of the human experience.

It is convincing to believe that the above-mentioned realities affecting the marginalized, especially women, are not abstract concepts. As in the Philippines, we encounter "new Michals" in our neighborhoods, churches, and workplaces. They can be the mothers

who sacrifice everything for their children, the activists who risk their lives for social change, and the wives who persevere in the face of marital challenges. By recognizing their struggles and celebrating their courage, we honor Michal's legacy and acknowledge the enduring power of her story in our lives.

Michal's story is not merely a biblical narrative or an experience of every woman in the neighborhood. More importantly, as a believer, her story is a call to action. As such, it challenges us to confront the ongoing injustices faced by women and to work towards building a society where women are valued, respected, and empowered. This task entails that by embracing biblical Michal's courage and resilience, we can strive to create a world where the "new Michals" among us are not victims of manipulation and exploitation, but agents of change and architects of a more just and equitable future.[77]

Conclusion

In this essay, we have pieced together the fragmented story of Michal in the Bible, found in 1 Sam 14:49; 18:20-28; 19:11-17; 25:44; 2 Sam 3:12-16; and 6:16-23. We have highlighted that Michal is the daughter of Saul and the wife of David, both of whom were kings during the early period of the Israelite monarchy. Given that she

[77] At the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, underlined the need to pay attention to the vital role of women in global recovery from the health crisis. See Antonio Guterres, "Put Women and Girls at the Centre of Efforts to Recover from Covid-19," *United Nations*, April 10, 2020, https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/put-women-and-girls-centre-efforts-recover-covid-19. In the final document of the Synod on Synodality, while the ordination of women was still ruled out, the role of women in leadership in the Church, in the formation of clergy, and in decision-making was nonetheless highlighted. See Almudena Martínez-Bordiú, "The Synod on Synodality's Final Document: What You Need to Know," *ACI Africa*, October 26, 2024, https://www.aciafrica.org/index.php/news/12695/the-synod-on-synodalitys-final-document-what-you-need-to-know; and Almudena Martínez-Bordiú, "Expanded Leadership for Women in Final Synod Document," *The Tablet*, October 27, 2024, https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/expanded-leadership-for-women-in-final-synod-document/.

was married to David, her cunning, courage, and prudence can be interpreted as signs of her love and loyalty to him. [78]

Applying feminist criticism, we have re-examined biblical Michal's story in light of contemporary experiences. In a world where marginalized women, the new Michal nowadays, are often treated as objects rather than persons, her character challenges our government and society to enact and implement laws that promote equality and justice. We need her feminine genius and dedication to help uplift the lives of the marginalized. She stands as a model of fidelity in a world where commitments are often tainted by materialism and egoism. Michal's name echoes the image of a God who is love—loyal, firm, fearless, and faithful. [79]

Feminist criticism encourages an ethically responsible interpretation of biblical texts. As believers, we are called to recover the feminine image of God in these texts, with Michal as our model:

- **By virtue of sacred yet broken personhood**, we participate in "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (*Gaudium et Spes* 1,1).
- **By virtue of our Christian identity**, through our baptismal vows, we actively embody God's call to be loving, compassionate, and loyal, even risking our lives for the sake of marginalized men and women.
- **By virtue of our devotion to Scripture as the Word of God**, we share our gifts and uniqueness in humble service and spiritual joy for the common good.

[78] See A. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 108–9.

[79] The name *Michal* consists of the particle of interrogation mi, meaning "who"; ke, the common particle of comparison, meaning "like" or "as"; and El, the shorter version of Elohim, meaning "God." This means that the name Michal expresses an inquiry after the nature of God: "Who is like God?" (See Exod. 15:11; Ps 35:10).

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Landas 37:1 (2025) 71–92

"INCLINE YOUR EAR TO MY CRY" (PSALM 88): WALTER BRUEGGEMANN'S THEOLOGY OF LAMENT IN/AND THE (POST)PANDEMIC WORLD

Maverick Angelo M. Pelayo

Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically disrupted the usual course of doing things by which the world and individuals are accustomed to and it continues to do so as many individuals and, five years on, sectors are still reeling from the multi-faceted effects of the pandemic. It is on this account that this contribution seeks to offer the role and relevance of lament when people and communities face various forms of crises. This contribution explores how the practice of lament according to Walter Brueggemann's theology can be understood, applied, and appropriated in difficult times like this as exemplified in Psalm 88, considered as the saddest psalm. In this paper, I will first present the key themes of Brueggemann's understanding of the psalms, specifically the lament psalms. Then, I will explore the words and actions of the divine and the psalmist in Psalm 88 and discern how the psalm characterizes them. Finally, I will draw some faith and praxis implications of Brueggemann's theology of lament and Psalm 88 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic world.

Keywords: COVID-19, Walter Brueggemann, lament, psychospiritual health

Introduction: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Call to Cry

"Today, facing a world that suffers so much, in which so many people suffer the consequences of this pandemic, I ask myself: Am I capable of crying as Jesus is now?"[1] These words from Pope Francis during his homily in a private yet livestreamed Holy Mass[2] at Casa Santa Marta highlight the significance of weeping during the unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Needless to say, the COVID-19 pandemic has truly caused a global crisis, generating a series of social, economic, and cultural effects while also having long-term impacts.[3] In particular, the pandemic has exposed, exacerbated, and even solidified existing inequalities in society in addition to the ever-worsening impact of climate change. The health crisis has also made some individuals and groups living in particular places and communities even more vulnerable than before, as seen in the death

[1] These words were taken from the homily of Pope Francis during the Fifth Sunday of Lent on March 29, 2020 at the Vatican. See Courtney Mares, "Pope Francis Prays for Those Who Weep from Coronavirus Loneliness or Loss," *Catholic News Agency,* March 29, 2020, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/44026/pope-francis-prays-for-those-who-weep-from-coronavirus-loneliness-or-loss.

[2] Because of health protocols imposed in Italy at that time, Pope Francis started celebrating Mass privately without a congregation, with the Vatican Media livestreaming the liturgy on social media. See Mares, "Pope Francis Prays."

[3] According to a World Bank report, global extreme poverty rose for the first time in 20 years because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic recession, pushing an estimated 150 million more people into extreme poverty. See Clare Duffy, "The Pandemic Could Push 150 Million More People Worldwide into 'Extreme Poverty'," *CNN*, October 7, 2020, https://edition.cnn. com/2020/10/07/ economy/global -poverty-rate-coronavirus/index.html. In the Philippines alone, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) reported that more Filipinos could slip into poverty and joblessness until 2021 due to the pandemic, particularly those in the capital region and other megacities. See Melissa Luz Lopez, "Pandemic May Keep More Filipinos Poor, Jobless until Next Year – NEDA," *CNN Philippines,* September 20, 2020, https://www.cnn.ph/news/2020/9/10/NEDA-poverty -unemployment-2021.html.

toll, the long COVID illness and associated conditions, as well as the mental health crisis that ensued.[4] Recent data from the World Health Organization reveals that globally, "one in eight individuals is living with a mental health condition"[5] as a result of the pandemic. In the Philippines, the study shows that 73% of Filipino Gen-Zs "indicate that they are more likely to experience mental health conditions than the average Filipino."[6] These statistics highlight the profound and ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other contemporary challenges, especially on mental health.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the resulting situations described above, and Pope Francis' invitation to question one's ability to cry during these times, the role of weeping in understanding important matters in life takes a unique and deeper sense as it challenges people to draw meaning out of life's harsh realities. Nevertheless, such ability to cry or weep in the face of extremely difficult situations seemed not to be given much emphasis among Christians. Federico Villanueva, a Filipino Old Testament scholar, attributes such inability to weep or even the fear of crying to the understanding that "God is in control and all things work together for good."[7] Hence, the expected

[4] While mental health-related disorders in the Philippines have been around even before the pandemic, the National Center for Mental Health (NCMH) reported an increase in the number of Filipinos facing mental health issues due to the pandemic, "receiving an average of 30 to 35 calls daily from March to May 2020 compared to 13 to 15 calls daily from May 2019 to February 2020". See Anna Malindog-Uy, "COVID-19 Impact on Mental Health of Filipinos," *The ASEAN Post*, July 19, 2020, https://theaseanpost.com/article/c ovid-19-impact-mental-health-filipinos.html.

[5] Dolly Dy-Zulueta, "A Silent Epidemic Emerging: The Rising Mental Health Concern," *Philstar.com*, January 12, 2024, https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/health-and-family/2024/01/12/2308964/silent-epidemic-emerging-rising-mental-health-concern.

[6] Dy-Zulueta, "Silent Epidemic."

[7] Federico Villanueva, "Preaching Lament," *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching,* ed. Kent Grenville et al. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 65.

response to any situation must always be that of praise, "in blessing and in suffering, in noonday light or in darkness."[8] In another work, Villanueva highlights that while a lot of biblical texts urge believers to rejoice, it becomes problematic when texts like "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4) and "I will bless the Lord at all times" (Ps 34:1) are absolutized in all situations.[9] It is no wonder that even in the context of the global health emergency, Villanueva observes how such reasoning is behind statements like "God is in control.", "God is telling us something. Listen!" and "This, too, shall pass!" as if impressing that it is unacceptable to fear and to be worried about the situation.[10] When someone dies, family members are thought to be consoled with words such as "She is now in heaven," as if relatives should not be affected by the reality of death.[11] By denying pain, stifling sorrow, dismissing doubts, and suppressing anger, one may miss experiencing life as it is and confront such difficulties head-on. This is why Pope Francis' invitation to cry or weep serves as an avenue to bridge the gap in the way Christians respond to the most pressing realities, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, such an invitation is a call to ponder one's capacity to honestly express and articulate one's feelings in the face of such limit situations, for certainly something is lost when these emotions and experiences are denied.

Walter Brueggemann's Theology of Lament

The American Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, following other scholars in the field of the Book of Psalms,[12] advocates

[8] Villanueva, "Preaching Lament," 65.

[9] Federico Villanueva, *It's OK to Be Not OK: The Message of the Lament Psalms* (Manila: OMF Literature, 2012), 91.

[10] Federico Villanueva, "Lament in A Time of Pandemic", April 4, 2020, https://omflit.com/blog/2020/4/2/lament-in-a-time-of-pandemic.

[11] Villanueva, "Lament in the Time of the Pandemic."

[12] See Brueggemann, "Necessary Conditions of a Good Loud Lament." On pages.20–21, Brueggemann gives a detailed and systematic presentation of the

for the recovery of the lament psalms for the "subsequent use of the church" as these do have "an important function in the community of faith"[13] especially when faced with extreme human experiences. Considered as one of the most influential and widely-read Bible interpreters in contemporary times, Brueggemann explores the role of the Psalms in the ancient faith of Israel and their relationship to the LORD. He accentuates that the Psalms do "function as voices of faith in the actual life of the believing community"[14] as they carry within them "the most remarkable and reliable sources for many situations"[15] the community may be faced with.

Psalms of lament have evocative power. They are expressed in cries that question God, such as "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps 13:1-2a). Using such expressions, "believers are given the chance and the words to express raw feelings of anger, hopelessness, discouragement, and weakness to and against the sometimes silent God."[16] Maintaining how laments "can provide important resources for our contemporary work of theology and ministry,"[17] Brueggemann observes that though

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efforts of biblical scholars in recovering the lament psalms, attributing such initiative, first and foremost, to Hermann Gunkel, a German Old Testament scholar, whom he regards as the great founder of the modern study of Psalms. Brueggemann likewise acknowledged Claus Westermann, who published *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (1977), the fifth edition of his earlier work entitled *Praise of God in the Psalms* (1961), as well as Erhard Gerstenberger and Rainer Albertz, both of whom were Westermann's students.

[13] Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 36 (1986): 10.

[14] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1984), 10.

[15] Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5, no. 17 (August 1980): 5.

[16] Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "Learn How to Weep." *Louvain Studies* 41, no. 4 (2018): 379.

[17] Walter Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," 3.

occupying one-third in the Book of Psalms, the lament psalms have been "totally excluded from man's (sic) relationship with God with the result that it has completely disappeared above all from prayer and worship."[18] Consequently, one's understanding of faith was also considerably affected. Brueggemann explains,

> I think that serious religious use of the lament psalms has been minimal because we have believed that faith does not mean to acknowledge and embrace negativity. We have thought that acknowledgment of negativity was somehow an act of unfaith, as though the very speech about it conceded too much about God's "loss of control."[19]

It is this notion of the lament psalms as an expression of unfaith that Brueggemann wishes to correct by accentuating how lament, though seen as a cry of desperation or even protest, is an "act of bold faith."[20] To prove this claim, he employs form criticism in his study of the lament psalms.[21] He identifies lament as a particular genre in Israel's religious poetry that arises and develops from their actual life experiences. Brueggemann explains,

> The faith of Israel, like all human experience, moved back and forth between the polar moods of deep anguish and misery to profound joy and celebration. In this back-and-forth movement, she worked

[18] Claus Westermann, "Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (1974): 25.

[19] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 52.

[20] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 52.

[21] Walter Brueggemann's theology of lament is developed through the lens of form criticism. In fact, in his very first article on lament, he asserts that "the study of lament is best pursued by the method of form criticism" ("From Hurt to Joy," 5). Consequently, in his masterwork *The Message of the Psalms,* he also acknowledges form criticism as the basis of his organizational structure (9). Form criticism which looks at the various forms of speech and its life setting builds upon Hermann Gunkel's biblical scholarship which Brueggemann has consistently turned to in his writings. By applying form criticism in his engagement on the lament psalms, Brueggemann believes that such method will lead one to an understanding of "both how Israel's faith understood and experience hurt and how it interpreted it in the context of its faith" ("From Hurt to Joy," 6).

> out the power and limits of her faith. In the process, she also worked out a pattern of rhetoric which shaped her anguish and brought it to expression so that it could be dealt with.[22]

In describing Israel's faith as such, Brueggemann recognizes how it is lived out within the people's daily experiences, such as in anguish, misery, joy, and celebration, therefore forming a certain pattern of rhetoric. Conversely, he describes that this pattern of rhetoric shaped Israel's faith as well. This certain pattern of rhetoric, which Brueggemann refers to, is the lament that articulates Israel's experiences arising from "raw and unfeigned emotion."[23] He asserts that it is the lament that actually "preserves Israel's most powerful and eloquent statements of the effort both to survive and to be transformed as people of faith."[24] Hence, he sees lament as intimately linked to Israel's daily struggle to live out her faith amid all their experiences in life.

Commenting further on Israel's experiences, Brueggemann perceives how "life, as it comes, along with joys, is beset by hurt, betrayal, loneliness, disease, threat, anxiety, bewilderment, anger, hatred, and anguish."[25] In its totality, Israel confronts the fact that "life is not always great" as it can be "disoriented and messy."[26] This recognition and reception of life's distressing realities lies at the heart of Israel, as it is primarily the people's experience of oppression in Egypt that prompted their "cry of distress" to God.[27] Out of their cry, God's power was evoked and seen in God's interventions to alleviate their

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[22] Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," 3.

[23] Donald F. Fredenburg, "The World-Making Power of the Psalms," 1.

[24] Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," 3.

[25] Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," 4.

[26] Lori Glenn, "Crying to the Lord: The Psalms of Lament," 18.

[27] Westermann, "The Role of the Lament," 21.

situation of distress, God initiated the contest of plagues, and God eventually delivered them from their oppression in Egypt.[28]

Israel, therefore, is no stranger to human suffering as the Exodus story shows. Whenever the people are faced with similar crisis situations, the memory of the Exodus event is brought forth. Immersed with distressing realities, the people would readily bring them to God as they did before. They believe that this God understands what is happening and has the power to transform it.[29] For Brueggemann, Israel's lament gives form to the worst experiences of the people's life, which are placed "in the presence of the one who alone can address a decisive word to those who suffer."[30] As Israel handles such challenges realistically, it conversely sees them as opportunities to evaluate their faith. Brueggemann explains,

> Israel characteristically met the hurtful dimensions of existence head-on, of course viewing them as faith crises, times of wondering about God and his fidelity, but also as faith opportunities, times to articulate again their expectations and assumptions, times to reformulate their position vis-à-vis the world of hurt and the God of faithfulness.[31]

One can see here that even the hurtful and painful dimensions in life are viewed in light of Israel's faith in God. Against the background of these experiences that God's people face squarely, they were able to all the more recognize the role of God in their lives as these circumstances are brought before God. Even in hurt and in pain, the people of Israel are deeply interconnected with God; they "have to do with God and he has to do with them."[32]

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[28] Walter Brueggemann and Tod Linafelt, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 80.

[29] Walter Brueggemann, "The Formfulness of Grief," *Interpretation* 31, no.3 (1977): 263.

[30] Brueggemann, "The Formfulness of Grief," 263.

[31] Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," 4.

[32] Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," 4.

Brueggemann, however, cautions that this whole process of pain-embrace requires "not only deep faith it requires faith of a new kind."[33] For him, this faith involves a "fresh hunch about this God" who himself "does not want to be an unchallenged structure" but actually "one who can be frontally addressed."[34] Since the outcome is still unknown, as one's response could have been possibly taken "as irreverent, disrespectful disobedience," Israel is seen as truly risking their faith with a God known by the legitimated structures of the day.[35] Nevertheless, as Brueggemann suggests, it is only through such risk that "a new mode of faith between God and Israel" can emerge.[36] Such faith is the very stuff of the lament addressed to God, received "not as disobedience, but as a new kind of obedience."[37] To this end, Israel's lament, as enabled by pain-embrace, pushes God's recharacterization as "the one who must take account of the trouble."[38]

Only on account of this dialogic character of the lament that Israel is enabled to "vent her greatest doubt, her bitterest resentments, her deepest anger" before God. They believe that God will seriously consider his part of the exchange. By transferring such troubles to God, they can wait for his response. As Israel cries out of the depths, describing their deep embrace of pain, they also convey their unwillingness to settle for that situation. They challenge the legitimated structures in place and push the matter forward to the LORD, whose listening ear and deliverance have been proven and tested throughout Israel's history. Constantly jumping from the heights of joy to the depths of pain, Brueggemann observes how Israel has struggled to live with such tension, maintaining that in all the seasons of life, nothing

[33] Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24, no.1 (2002): 401.

[34] Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II," 401.

[35] Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II," 401.

[36] Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II," 401.

[37] Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II," 401.

[38] Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II," 402.

falls outside God's active intervention. Individual and communal disorientation can be transformed by God, who pervades all of life's realities. Lament works as individuals' and communities' emotions rage, as pain creeps through, and as the desire for such experience to be altered and transformed is longed for. Brueggemann's theology of lament is built from the very experiences of Israel with their God, who has revealed himself as one who listens and hears the cry of his people.

Psalm 88: Characterization of the Psalmist and the LORD God

Moving on to the second major part of the paper, let us discern Brueggemann's theology of lament and the images of the psalmist and God in Psalm 88, the saddest psalm.[39] Known for its continual lament with response yet to be delivered, such a psalm opens us to the reality that it is not always the case that God's listening ear saves the day. To carry out this task, David Rhoads' method of characterization will be employed.[40] Characterization is mainly a method in narrative criticism that centers on the speeches and actions of the biblical character as well as those that the character "actively or inactively interacts with."[41] For Rhoads, understanding biblical characters paves the way for

[39] See Tony Ash, "The Saddest Psalm in the Psalter," Leaven 4, no. 1 (2012): 13–15; Ernst R. Wendland, "'Darkness Is My Closest Friend' (Ps 88:18b): Reflections on the Saddest Psalm in the Psalter," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (May 25, 2016): 7, https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i1.1543; For Klaas Spronk, "Good Death and Bad Death in Ancient Israel According to Biblical Lore," *Social Science & Medicine* 58, no. 5 (2004): 989, the psalmist is in "total despair"; For Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 78, the psalm is an "embarrassment to conventional faith."

[40] See David Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 3 (1982): 411–34.

[41] Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "Rejoice with Me: Preaching the Joy of the Gospel as Cornerstone of the Parish Community Life," *Pamisulu* 5 (2018): 38.

comprehending the text.[42] While others may insist that the psalms are written as poetry, Robert Alter argues that an unfolding plot is also present in poetic texts, or what he calls "narrativity," the narrative development of a metaphor.[43] When characterization is applied to the narrativity of Psalm 88, the psalmist's self-characterization in Psalm 88 will highlight what the psalmist says and does, what others say to or about the psalmist, and what others do to, for, or against the psalmist. Likewise, the psalmist's characterization of the LORD God in Psalm 88, which details the psalmist's understanding of who God is based on what God says or does not say and on what God does or does not do, is also worked out. By these considerations on characterization, Psalm 88 is read closely to discover "minute details or bigger patterns from where one can theologize."[44] Hence, by employing characterization of the psalmist and the LORD in Psalm 88, this part features how the psalmist's loud lament in Psalm 88 is unexpectedly met by a stark silence on the LORD's end, showing that God's response of deliverance is yet to come.

Who is the psalmist in Psalm 88? It can be seen how the psalmist exhaustively utilizes the lament tradition of Israel in coming before God identified as the psalmist's LORD (88:1). Clearly, it is the psalmist who is the initiator of the exchange with the LORD, operating within the dialogic character of the covenant relationship established by the LORD with his people. Against this background, the psalmist painstakingly employs all possible ways and plausible means to prod the LORD's attention to the petitions, even by overstating them. These means include the daily and nightly crying (88:1, 9, 13), the graphic articulation of the complaint replete with varied allusions to death (88:3–8, 10–12, 14–18), the use of recurring "motivations" in the form of rhetorical questions (88:10–12) the calling attention to one's sorry

[42] Robert Alter, "From Line to Story in Biblical Verse," *Poetics Today* 4, no. 4 (1983): 615–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/1772317.

[43] Alter, "From Line to Story."

[44] Ibita, "Rejoice with Me," 39.

physical state (88:9), and even the invoking past experiences from his youth (88:15).

Based on the many references to death that the psalmist describes, the reader can sense how the psalmist is not only in a helpless but distressing situation. The psalmist reaches the point of identifying oneself as not only close to death but even experiencing death itself (88:5). The psalmist's courageous acceptance of the deathly situation is expressed by the various allusions to it. The relinquishment of one's old state is also shown here as the psalmist admits the present situation of disorientation. While not explicitly mentioning what accounted for such experience, the psalmist directly points to the LORD himself as the cause of the predicament expressed in a series of blatant accusations hurled against the LORD (88:6–8, 14–17). Brueggemann is right in saying that "Psalm 88 is a direct, forceful accusation against God, in which the speaker not only names the trouble but places the trouble at the door of YHWH."[45] These accusations are also the psalmist's way of earnestly appealing to the LORD, who is in a position to transform the psalmist's condition. The change of state is not only for the benefit of the psalmist but also for the LORD's praise. The psalmist's rhetorical questions appeal to God's honor: "Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise you? Selah. Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness? (88:10–12).[46] Suffering physically and spiritually (88:3) as a result of the isolation from one's friends (verses 8, 18) and the withdrawal of the LORD's presence (verse 14), the psalmist describes the situation through unsuppressed emotions of anger and dismay, articulating it with unfiltered language of candidness and boldness. Willingly crying out of the depths (88:1, 9, 13) and stretching out one's hands (88:9), the psalmist fully embraces pain and clings to the LORD even through the sole companionship of darkness (88:18).

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[45] Walter Brueggemann and Patrick D. Miller, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 56.

[46] Unless otherwise stated, biblical quotations come from *NRSV*.

While the seeming inaction to aid the psalmist portrays an unresponsive, silent, or even an absent God, "the unanswered plea does not silence the speaker."[47] Though disoriented by the situation, the psalmist remains patient yet unyielding, relentless in lament, even exploring all the means to prod the LORD's attention. For Brueggemann, "the speaker never entertains the possibility of withdrawing from conversation with God, never considers the prospect that such talk is futile or that help must be sought elsewhere."[48] The psalmist remains steadfast until the longed-for salvation comes and transforms the situation. Such is the psalmist's faith—one that is marked by resoluteness and decisiveness. Perhaps, this faith is what sustains the psalmist in disorientation until a new orientation comes.

Who is the LORD God in Psalm 88? It should be noted that throughout Psalm 88, the LORD God invoked by the psalmist neither appears nor speaks. It is only through the psalmist's cry for help, the voicing of petition, and the articulation of situation addressed to the LORD that we can picture the character of this LORD. As early as 88:1, the psalmist regards the deity as the LORD (verse 1), his sovereignty fully acknowledged. By attaching the attribution "God of my salvation" (88:1), the psalmist indicates and invokes the LORD's saving power. The certainty of the LORD's saving help, however, is far from coming, given the persisting distressing situation of the psalmist as the psalm progresses. As the psalmist claims, such a situation is even intensified by no less than the LORD himself, whom the psalmist unabashedly accuses as responsible for the situation of suffering from the very start. According to the psalmist, the LORD has put him to the inescapable Sheol (88:6), placed his wrath (chēmāh) over him (88: 7, 16), which crushes him like disastrous waves (88:7, 17). What is worse is that the LORD has withdrawn his presence from the psalmist (verse 14) and deprived him of his friends' companionship (88:8, 18). Worst of all, it is the LORD's seeming abandonment of the psalmist that is taken as the prime reason behind the psalmist's personal despair and the desertion of others. Had the LORD been mindful and honored the

[47] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 79.

[48] Brueggemann and Miller, *Psalms and the Life of Faith,* 56.

terms of the established covenant by immediate reciprocation and presence, the psalmist would not have been left wallowing in this experience of disorientation.

These aforementioned reasons justify the psalmist's complaint of the LORD's apparent reneging on the covenant, while the psalmist claims that he has not defaulted on the covenant from his youth. From the LORD's end, however, there is no single response or explanation despite the psalmist's accusations and rhetorical interrogations. Only silence. Given this silent response from the LORD, if such can really be qualified as one, the psalmist nevertheless persistently invokes the LORD. The psalmist appeals to how the LORD has been characterized through time, and to whom the LORD is for him. This presentation of who the LORD is recharacterizes the LORD's silence. The unresponsiveness of the LORD does not connote absence, as the LORD is someone capable of receiving one's pain, just as God manifested God's self to Israel through time. The psalm firmly upholds the belief that the LORD cannot be confined to the legitimated structures, as the LORD is ever involved in the deep distresses of the covenanted people who continue to cry out for help. This memory of who the LORD is fuels the psalmist's faith and lament. The reader is given the understanding that, though the LORD is silent all throughout the psalm, as long as the LORD can be frontally appealed to just as what the psalmist is doing, the LORD "is there and must be addressed."[49] Besides, the reality of the LORD's silence amid humanity's anguish only envisages how "life is like that,"[50] that there are no quick and easy answers in explaining life's predicaments. Yet as lament psalms "intend to speak of all of life,"[51] one is encouraged to voice out one's pain, without yielding to the present situation of distress. Psalm 88 depicts that no matter how one is met by the LORD's silence and deprived of God's immediate response, the covenant relationship stands.

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[49] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 79.

[50] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 80.

[51] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 80.

In the meantime, the psalmist's continual lament amid continued experience of disorientation testifies to his utter refusal to remain in such a situation until the longed-for salvation and new orientation come. From the outset, the psalmist does not forget that salvation has already taken root, given his acknowledgement of the past history with the LORD, the God of his own salvation. The psalmist's insistence, through and through, that the LORD is present in one's life is seen even in such a death-dealing situation. Such a depiction only proves how lament can be very dynamic even amid the air of total despair. As exemplified in Psalm 88, the most dynamic laments ever raised are the ones articulated during the most intense experiences of disorientation. They can foster an even renewed relationship with this LORD, whose saving presence in the past far surpasses his seeming absence in the present. Psalm 88 also proves that the LORD's presence pervades in such difficult experiences and bears witness to the LORD who is "present in, participating in, and attentive to the darkness, weakness, and displacement of life."[52] In a way, Psalm 88 reinforces this assurance to present-day readers whose distress resonates with the psalmist. Brueggemann is truly right in asserting that Psalm 88 is "a resource as precious as it is peculiar."[53] Psalm 88 speaks to and engages the contemporary life of faith marked by crisis situations. Psalm 88 clearly shows that "wrestling with God has value even when we fail to find the answers."[54]

Conclusion and Implications: Lament and the Post-COVID-19 World

Looking back at the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding Walter Brueggemann's theology of lament, and exploring Psalm 88, we are presented with a valuable resource in dealing with distressing situations. In times of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, its immediate aftermath, and its long-term effects in various aspects of individual

[52] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 52.

[53] Brueggemann and Miller, *Psalms and the Life of Faith,* 8.

[54] Villanueva, "Preaching Lament," 78.

and communal life,[55] delving deep into the realm of spirituality is vital. These circumstances ultimately call for such a kind of prayer that cries out to God for help, conveying one's unwillingness to remain in such an experience of disorientation. Brueggemann underlines that laments do play "an important function in the community of faith"[56] and that they "can provide important resources for our contemporary work of theology and ministry."[57] Lament is, therefore, vital today as it was before. After all, amidst this continued season of disorientation, believers can lament more courageously and boldly express the hope for a God who extends his helping hand and inclines his listening ear to those who cry out of the depths because this is the same saving LORD as before. Now, what implications on faith and praxis can we gather from this exploration?

1. The capacity to lament in critical times transforms the person and the person's faith.

It was described above how lament speaks of the believer's audacity to face and accept squarely the present situation one is in. It enables one to face the present reality as it is without denying or covering up the feelings that arise from it. Israel, in all their varied life experiences, managed to go through the tensions of life by courageously facing such realities head-on, especially the challenging and upsetting moments of their life. What is crucial during this time is the vulnerable relinquishment of the known, settled way of living to pave the way for the new, emerging one. Distressing as it may be when tortured seasons do come, the believer's capacity to embrace

[55] See, for example, Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE), "Global Map"; Calonzo, "Why the Philippines"; Calonzo, "Why the Philippines Is Once Again the Worst Place to Be in Covid"; Bettinger-Lopez and Bro, "A Double Pandemic"; Brower, "The Mental Health Crisis Generated By COVID-19"; Fallesen, "How COVID-19"; Costa et al., "Mental Health"; Ceballos, Hernandez, and Paz, "Covid-19 and Extreme Weather."

[56] Brueggemann, "Costly Loss of Lament," 57.

[57] Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," 3.

such realities is needed so that one can ground oneself and brave through the present disorientation. The psalmist in Psalm 88 was able to articulate the symbolic experience of death itself by admitting one's present situation of disorientation (88: 3-9), by relinquishing the old state or situation (88:5), and consequently, pleading for the LORD to actively intervene in this situation (88: 1, 9, 13), no matter the delay on the part of the LORD.

Appropriating these insights to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its immediate and lasting effects in various aspects of social, cultural, economic, and political realms of societal life,[58] lament shatters the disillusionment of the life pre-pandemic and enables people to accept the difficult and challenging realities that resulted from it. This will be possible if the person honestly expresses their feelings, courageously accepts that the life one used to know before, albeit imperfect, is already gone, and yet willfully insists that this present, upsetting situation may be altered. It is along this process where one's faith is also worked out and deepened.[59] As with Israel's faith, which was all the more emboldened during the move from a settled orientation into an experience of disorientation as articulated in their lament, the move from the life pre-pandemic to the present situation opens an opportunity for one's faith and person to be transformed. Certain crises inevitably come in life. Only in facing such life's realities with unsuppressed emotions that one discovers that even those

[58] See, for example, CSSE, "Global Map"; Baum and Hai, "Hospitality, Tourism, Human Rights and the Impact of COVID-19"; Farley, "Prostitution, the Sex Trade, and the COVID-19 Pandemic"; Freedom House, "Democracy"; D'Adamo, *Assessment*; Borio and Vora, "G20"; Hartwell and Devinney, "Populism"; Jones, Palumbo, and Brown, "Coronavirus"; Donovan, "Conflict"; Bollettino et al., "COVID-19-Related Mental Health Challenges and Opportunities Perceived by Mental Health Providers in the Philippines"; Baraka, Ramadan, and Hassan, "Predictors of Critical Care Nurses' Stress, Anxiety, and Depression in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic"; Ostadtaghizadeh et al., "Gender-Based Violence Against Women During the Covid-19 Pandemic."

[59] See, for example, Francesco Chirico, "Spirituality to Cope with Covid-19 Pandemic, Climate Change and Future Global Challenges"; and "Faith."

unwelcome disturbances are proper arenas for faith to be deepened and transformed, so one can navigate life anew.

2. Lament shapes one's understanding of God.

With Israel's straightforward dealings with the LORD and the psalmist's unfiltered address to the saving God of Psalm 88 (vv. 6–8,14–17), the LORD is characterized as someone "who can deal with our difficult questions and accept our humanness in all its fullness."[60] Therefore, it is possible and even encouraged that people and communities go before God with questions, complaints, hurts, and doubts, especially the various feelings generated by the devastating effects of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. The dialogic character of lament flows from the dynamic covenant relationship established by God with Israel.

As seen in Psalm 88, the psalmist employed all possible means in the lament to recognize and articulate the disorienting reality one is in and the unsuppressed emotions that come along with it. The psalm includes expressions of anger against and disgust with God. These emotions are all presented to the LORD. The psalmist's recharacterization of the divine shows that the LORD is capable of receiving such a cry and could possibly be moved to action because of the speaker's painful experiences. By articulating the hurts and pains, the psalmist expects that God will also embrace such pain himself, make it his own pain, and thereafter be involved in transforming the speaker's situation for the better. Again, though there is a delay in God's response in Psalm 88, the psalmist's insistence that the LORD is present though silent and that the LORD is active though seemingly unresponsive, makes the psalmist confident in the address to God, expressed with one's inmost emotions and feelings.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, even after five years, provoked people to ask questions like, "Until when, LORD?"; "Why the death of my son?"; "Why all of these

[60] Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "The World and God's Word: Of COVID-19, VUCA World, and Visions for the Future," *Landas* 34, no.2 (2020): 149.

difficulties, Lord?"; "Don't you care about us anymore?" One should not think that complaining before God is prohibited because "God is God".[61] We should not "shy away from asking God serious questions, raising concerns about injustice, betrayal, and perceived abandonment of the divine."[62] God can handle these emotions and complaints, as attested by Israel's faith and as what the psalmist in Psalm 88 insists and believes in.

3. Lament gives words to one's authentic prayer.

At first reading, Psalm 88 seems to be shocking to the reader as the speaker hurls down protests and complaints before the LORD (vv. 6–8, 14–17), even accusing the divine of being the very reason for one's harsh predicament. However, a closer reading of the Psalm, especially through the characterization of the psalmist and the LORD, shows that such words are necessary for the psalmist to fully enunciate his distressing situation and painstaking desire for the LORD to take heed of the petition for help. The psalmist in Psalm 88 truly embodies the covenant of God with Israel as he continues to be a dialogue partner of the LORD. No amount of continued distress and even the further delay of the LORD's deliverance can preclude the psalmist from this continual lament in Psalm 88. The psalmist persists in holding on to the covenant and resists doubting the God of his salvation. The psalmist continues to prod the covenant partner in this plea so the LORD can respond and alter the psalmist's situation.

On account of the necessity to keep the dialogic character of lament, where the one praying truly pours out one's heart before God through one's unfiltered words, Brueggemann underlines how costly it is to lose the necessity to lament.[63] Ma. Maricel Ibita affirms Brueggemann's observations by explaining that the

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[61] Ibita, "The World and God's Word," 149.

[62] Ibita, "The World and God's Word," 150.

[63] Brueggemann, "Costly Loss of Lament," 60–65.

> (1) inability to lament waters down our being covenant partners of God because we have ceased to be dialogue partners and have only become yes-people of a seemingly punishing or absent god; (2) it stifles questions of theodicy or raising questions when evil things happen to good and innocent people and when we fail to legitimately question matters of injustice and oppression; (3) we forget that words in our Jewish-Christian faith have world-making capacities and, therefore, can help us articulate and construct new realities; and (4) our inability to lament diminishes our being made in the image and likeness of God who upholds justice, peace, integrity, and sustainability of all creation.[64]

These losses show how lament gives words to one's prayer. For Villanueva, laments allow us to pray "when we just don't know what to say, or when we feel like our own prayers may not be right because they are too painful or may hurt God."[65] Through lament, one's prayer becomes authentic; one has a voice and genuinely interacts with God, no matter what one feels. As a result, lament enables the one who prays to not only cope with the present distressing situation but also opens one to the task of raising vital issues with God. In terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns including the well-being of both human and beyond-human members of the creation community were included as they, too, were also greatly affected by the global health crisis.[66]

4. Lament enunciates one's suffering and invites one to be in solidarity with the suffering of others.

As the words articulated in laments depict one's sufferings, the move to bring these complaints before God also empowers the believer

[64] Ibita, "The World and God's Word," 151.

[65] Villanueva, "Preaching Lament," 240.

[66] See Brower, "The Mental Health Crisis"; Costa et al., "Mental Health"; Bollettino et al., "COVID-19-Related Mental Health Challenges"; Cheval et al., "Observed and Potential Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Environment"; Armitage and Nellums, "Water"; Cheval et al., "Observed and Potential Impacts"; Rume and Islam, "Environmental Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic and Potential Strategies of Sustainability."

to cope with them and allows one to be in solidarity with the suffering of others. This moment is best expressed with one's capacity to cry or weep, just like the challenge Pope Francis mentioned at the beginning of this contribution. By weeping or crying, the pain and suffering we are in are expressed. The covenant between the enslaved Israelites and the LORD commenced when they cried. "God heard their groaning… God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them" (Exodus 2:23–25). This pivotal experience of Israel solidly attests how the people's cry from the depths, understood as their embrace of pain and articulation of their suffering in Egypt, impelled God to hear their cry and act on their situation by liberating them from slavery.

This memory of salvation is what also animates the psalmist in Psalm 88. At the beginning of the lament, the psalmist already acknowledges the previous saving presence of the LORD (88:1), even if it seems that God is starkly silent throughout the rest of the psalm. Expressed with one's intensified daily and nightly crying (verses 1, 9, 13), the psalmist brings out the experience of pain and suffering through tears presented to the LORD. The psalmist even mentions that the weeping has resulted already in the swelling of the eyes, signaling how one has been used to suffering, even to the point of identifying one's situation as that of destruction and death. Through these tears that have become one's "bread day and night" (like Psalm 42:4), the psalmist envisages his full acceptance of the situation and unyielding resolution to rouse the LORD to alter such a situation. Likewise, these tears also speak of what the psalmist holds dear and which are unavailable right now—his life, his friends, his LORD. By weeping, the psalmist shows what he mostly valued and firmly upholds amidst the surrounding total darkness and the experiences of death. Therefore, tears can reveal what we value most. Weeping bridges us to the cries of others. Lamentations "attune our senses to our own emotions, they make us also sensitive to the need and suffering of others."[67] One's experience of suffering leads one to be in solidarity with the suffering of others.

[67] Ibita, "Learn How to Weep," 389.

To conclude, having discovered the implications of recovering the practice of lament during disorienting situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, its aftermath, and its lingering effects five years on, we are led to the realization of this great gift of lament that we inherited from our ancestors in faith, born out of God's covenantal relationship with them. Grounded firmly in this partnership, the LORD fosters an intimacy with his people by way of a dialogical encounter with them. Through lament, the individual and the community are enabled to embrace the reality they are in, to use one's voice and tears to pour out the inmost contents of the heart amidst a disorienting situation, to lend one's voice to others who find themselves in the same situation, and to discover the silent accompaniment of the God who also embraces the same reality where one is. These implications truly point out how, through lament, **it's OKAY to be OA**, to be overacting! In the face of hard-pressing realities, one cannot be nonchalant in facing and embracing them. As seen in Psalm 88, the speaker exhausts all ways and means to persuade the God revealed as an OA God, *an overactive* and *ever-active* God of salvation.

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SUMAINYO ANG KAPAYAPAAN: CAN PEACE BE DISPENSED? SEARCHING FOR THE PROBABLE MEANING OF THE PEACE GREETING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN JOHN 20

Rhoneil M. Arevalo

Abstract. *Sumainyo ang kapayapaan* is a formal translation of the peace greeting in John 20. But does the Filipino, specifically the Tagalog translation, capture the intent of the Gospel writer? The evangelist seems to be saying that he intended more than a peace greeting when he employed on three different occasions in the passage as mentioned above, "Peace be with you." The literary structure of John 20 provides hints that the author is considering other functions for the peace salutations, such as an exhortation to the frightened disciples to be courageous. This perspective is discerned from the Johannine use of literary devices like dualism, symbolism, contrast, repetitions, and other literary clues such as statement of time element (late Sunday evening) and the locked doors that may suggest the collective fear of Jesus' disciples amid the threat of violence posed by the religious authorities. The Greek form of the peace salutation, Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, seems to present alternative meanings of the greetings in John 20 concerning the story about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. A practical application of the result of the exegetical analysis of the peace phrase in John 20 will be sought in the light of the current theological and ecclesial

political crises that are tearing The United Methodist Church in the Philippines apart. In the face of such religious violence, how can the United Methodist Church appropriate the peace greetings of John 20?

Keywords: *kapayapaan*, greeting, exhortation, homosexuality, LGBTQI+, *loob*

Introduction

Peace be with you is almost always understood to mean a traditional Jewish greeting. In fact, its fixed categorization as a Jewish greeting of well-being seems to discourage any appreciation of it other than as a salutation.

However, a close reading of the phrase may reveal a rift or a break between "the Semitic background of the peace greeting and the notion of the Greek word for peace in the minds of John's audience."[1] Is *Peace be with you* a peace salutation in the manner of a traditional Semitic greeting only, or should one understand it in the context of John's Gospel? The evangelist seems to have put forth a different function for the peace phrase, especially as one considers how it was woven into the narrative of John 20:19–29. One sees at once the inappropriateness of a salutation function when one factors in the context of the episode. The fear and unbelief of the disciples emanating from the threat of violence from the religious authorities and their followers inform the story about the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in the upper room. The dark and gloomy atmosphere pervading the story makes one anticipate not a greeting but an exhortation, i.e., do not fear.

It is also noteworthy that the word for peace in the Gospel appears in specific instances where the disciples appeared worried, upset, or afraid (14:27; 20:19) or in a state of unbelief (16:29–33; 20:24–28).2 These passages hint that the evangelist John may not even

[1] R. Arevalo, "Peace with You: Exploring Translation Possibilities of the Peace Greeting in John 20 in Tagalog," *The Bible Translator* 74, no. 1 (2023): 80.

[2] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 80.

be considering peace in a theological sense but may have ascribed to it a psychological meaning. Thus, *sumainyo ang kapayapaan* may have been an artificial translation of the peace phrase so that it ill fits the context of John 20. *Kapayapaan*, in the mind of the Filipino, is the tranquil or serene state or condition of the *loob* (inner self) that one cannot simply dispense or give to another, as is implied in "peace be with you."[3] This translation leaves open the possibility that there lies a different meaning and usage in John's Gospel of "Peace be with you" other than a traditional Jewish salutation. But first, the problem of a literal translation of the peace phrase must be addressed before proceeding to the task of determining its probable meaning.

Sumainyo Ang Kapayapaan: The Problem of a Literal Translation

The peace statements in John may trace their origins and functions in the Old Testament and so reveal a Semitic background. "Peace be with you" finds several expressions in Hebrew, namely, שָׁלוֹם לָכֶם in Genesis 43:23, אַתָּה שָׁלוֹם in 1 Sam.25:6, and the more popular one שָׁלוֹם לְךָ (Judges 6:23, 19:20; 1 Sam.20:21, etc.). The Hebrew form varies in form depending on whom it is addressed. In the above examples, the first is addressed to multiple recipients (Joseph's brothers), and the next two forms were directed to individual addressees. What keeps the Hebrew salutation recognizable, at least in form, is the word *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם). Shalom suggests wholeness, completeness, good health, and peace with the self and with others. Shalom may also connote "love, full health, prosperity, redistribution of goods and reconciliation."[4] Peace is, therefore, just one aspect of the Hebraic concept of shalom. Because of shalom's broad meaning, it could be understood to occupy the topmost place in the tier of the Old Testament's covenantal values. The unpredictability of life in the wilderness and the constant threat

[3] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 80.

[4] L.N. Navarro Castro and Jasmin Nario-Galace, *Peace Education, A Pathway to a Culture of Peace,* 2nd ed. (Quezon City: Miriam College, 2010), 25. See also Willard M. Swartley, "The Relation of Justice/Righteousness to Shalom/Eirēnē," *Ex Auditu* 22 (2006): 29–53.

of war would have moved the Hebrew individual to long for shalom. These threats to one's existence thrust shalom high in the consciousness of every Israelite to become a most cherished ideal. It may have been because of this that shalom is used in a greeting of well-being. *Shalom* becomes synonymous with the Hebraic ideal of the good.[5]

In the New Testament, the NT writers used the Greek word for peace, εἰρήνη, with three meanings in mind. εἰρήνη may mean the absence of strife (Luke 14:32; Acts 12:20; Eph 2:14-17) or a restored relationship (Rom 5:1; Eph 2:15; Col 1:20) or peace of mind or serenity (Rom 15:13; Phil 4:7).[6] The third meaning of peace may have been what the evangelist John had in mind when he employed the concept in his narration of the Jesus' story. εἰρήνη appears six times in the Gospel. In these instances, peace could be understood to mean a quiet heart or joy within or joy in the heart.[7]

If the peace that John's Jesus spoke of in John 20 concerns peace of mind, then context will tell us that "Peace be with you" could not be understood in terms of its usual function or sense as a Hebrew or Jewish salutation. This context partially explains why its literal translation in Tagalog, *sumainyo ang kapayapaan*, appears artificial and lacks any sense. In the context of fear of the disciples due to the threat of violence and physical harm from the Jewish authorities as hinted by the locked doors of the upper room (John 20:19), the Filipino or Tagalog reader does not expect a greeting of peace but an exhortation not to fear, *huwag matakot*, from Jesus. This peace is the quietness of the heart in the face of the tribulation that Jesus had just disclosed to his disciples in John 14:27. Peace, understood in this manner, may be something inherent in the Filipino concept of the *loob* (inner self). The *loob* is likened to "a cave of Filipino thought, an emotive state, a true self, a center of personality, a world of being, and a core of indigenous

[5] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 81.

[6] C.L. Milton, "Peace in the NT," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al., 5 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 4: 706.

[7] Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, A Handbook on the Gospel of John, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980).

value."[8] It belongs to the realm of the *within*, inner traits that "build peace, compassion, empathy… and a hunger for reconciliation."[9] In other words, this peace takes root in the heart and mind or *loob* of an individual, which can only be nurtured or possibly be lost under certain conditions like the presence of threats to one's existence. Peace, in the mind of a Filipino, cannot be sourced from the outside, even if it comes from the dispenser of peace, who is Jesus Christ.

An exegetical analysis of John 20:19-29 will help narrow the gap that exists between the function of the peace statements and the Filipino expectation of an exhortation of the peace formula, "Peace with you."

Peace With You in the Context of the Threat of Violence in John 20

Before one can deal with the peace phrase in John 20, one needs to find out the evangelist's understanding and employment of the key term *peace* in the Jesus' story as it was presented in his gospel. How important is peace in the overall Johannine theology in the Gospel and 1 John? What is this peace all about? Is the 'Johannine' peace more than a component or element in the traditional Jewish peace salutation? This inquiry needs to start with John's use of peace in the Gospel.

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[8] Jairus D. Espiritu and Marielle A.H. Zosa, quoting Pe-Pua (2017), "Loob and Meaningfulness: A Filipino Theory of Meaning in Life," paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Philosophy and Meaning of Life, University of Pretoria, South Africa, January 17–19, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication. See also Jeremiah Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," *Asian Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2015): 148–71, https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2015.1043173; Christine Carmela R. Ramos, "Filipino Concept of 'Loob'," *Respons: Jurnal Etika Sosial* 25, no. 2 (2020): 143–57, https://doi.org/10.25170/respons.v25i02.2467.

[9] J. Backman, "Peacebuilding from the Inside Out: The 'Work of the Soul' as a Key to Working with Others," *Journal of Living Together* 4–5, no. 1 (2018): 73.

Peace in the Gospel of John

The word peace (εἰρήνη) appears 6 times in the Gospel of John. It is noteworthy to comment on the concentration of the evangelist's employment of the word in chapters 14 and 20. The first two occurrences are in John 14:27 and the next three in John 20:19, 21, and 26. The passage where it stands alone is found in John 16:33. In all these cases, Jesus pronounced peace in the context of crises, namely, in his forthcoming departure from the world in chapters 14 and 16 and from the threat of violence in John 20. In John, peace does not mean the absence of strife but a quiet heart or peace of mind in the face of the uncertainty that would follow Jesus' departure and the threat of annihilation from the hands of the religious authorities and their supporters.

To understand the Johannine concept of peace, it must be related to the key concepts employed several times in the Gospel. These words are *life, light,* and *truth*. These Johannine concepts appear to tie up the Jesus' narrative into a cohesive whole in the Gospel. John used life thirty-six times, light twenty-two times, and truth eight times.[10] In the evangelist's thought, these three terms are interconnected. This interconnection is established very early in John 1 where *life* is used twice, *light* five times, and *truth* two times.[11] By his multiple use of these words, John appears to be making the connection that life originates from the Word, and from life comes light (1:4) and truth (1:17).

The Jesus' story, according to John, revolves around the plot where the sons of darkness, Abraham's descendants, threatened life, which source is the Word (8:37). The enemies, the Jewish authorities in Judea,[12] tirelessly looked for ways and means to end Jesus' life causing

[10] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 82.

[11] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 82.

[12] Regarding the Gospel of John's perceived negative portrayal of Jews, Ekkehardt. Müller examines the terms "Jews," "Israel," and "Pharisees" as found in the Synoptic Gospels and Johannine literature. His findings suggest a more balanced view, showing that John does not condemn all Jews but highlights a

him to restrict his movement (7:1). The threat became so great that Jesus himself decided that it is not profitable to place his person into harm's way (11:54). Thus, John presents Jesus retreating from the world in chapters 13 to 17 where he placed Jesus in the upper room with the disciples. Inside the room, Jesus spent the remaining days of his life addressing the disciples through a long discourse.

Raymond Brown takes a different position. He points out that peace in 14:27 neither means the absence of warfare nor has anything to do with psychological tension.[13] Brown sees in it the fulfillment of the eschatological dreams of the Old Testament prophet in Jesus' indwelling of the disciples at his post-resurrection appearance in John 20:20-22. Brown observes that John's use of peace with joy in 20:19-20 leads one to the beginning of the eschatological period,

> … in Jewish thought, peace and joy were marks of eschatological period when God's intervention would have brought about harmony in human life and in the world.[14]

Brown's position may be at odds with the framing of peace in the Gospel of John, and his eschatological position is unsupported in the other book traditionally assigned to the evangelist, 1 John. While there are some questions as to the Johannine authorship of 1 John, internal evidences show presupposition of important theological features of the Gospel in the epistle, like the prologue and the play of the old and new commandments that were sustained in the epistle.[15] In this writer's view, the author of the Gospel and the epistle may be

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Messianic community of believers composed of both Jews and those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. See Ekkehardt Müller, "The Jews and the Messianic Community in Johannine Literature," *DavarLogos* 4, no. 2 (2005): 159–80.

[13] Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York, Doubleday, 1970), 653.

[14] Brown, *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI*, 1035.

[15] Robert A. Spivey and D. Moody Smith, *The Letters of John: Love, Doctrine, and Church Politics, in Anatomy of the New Testament, A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 416.

one and the same person. It was previously mentioned that in the six times that peace appeared in John's Gospel, the contexts suggest fear owing to the uncertainty following Jesus' impending departure (14:27, 16:33) and the threat of violence from the religious authorities to their corporate existence (20:19, 21, and 26). In 1 John, the evangelist appears to anticipate a battle royale against the enemies of Jesus. This confrontation would happen in the last days. Brown's eschatological hope of total harmony is not realized in Jesus' indwelling of his disciples as hinted in the locked doors of John 20:26, just a few days after the risen Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples (v.22). The war with the enemies of their Lord was about to begin. This realization is picked up in 1 John 2:18–21.

The author opens this section of the letter with a pronouncement of the last day,

Παιδία, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, lit., children, it is (the) last hour

The appearance of the antichrist (ἀντίχριστος) would determine the last hour. In John's view, the coming out of many antichrists (ἀντίχριστοι) would precede this event. What distinguishes the former from the latter? The antichrist refers to a figure that will appear at the end of time. Its distinguishing feature is that "such a person is not to be a part of ordinary life."[16] The plural form, on the other hand, refers to the "false teachers, persons whom John and his readers were encountering everyday."[17] By placing the antichrist and the antichrists in close proximity in verse 18, the epistle writer seems to be making this argument: "the antichrist will come in the last hour—antichrists

[16] C. Haas, M. de Jonge, and J.L. Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1972), https://demo-tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-1-john-218/.

[17] Haas, et al, *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* https://demo-tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-1-john-218/.

exist now—consequently the last hour is now."[18] The latter sign firms up his belief that the last hour has indeed approached,

> ὅθεν γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν. lit., from which we know that it is the last hour

1 John 2:20 seems to allude to the evangelist's report of Jesus' breathing (ἐνεφύσησεν) the Holy Spirit on the disciples in John 20:22. However, the dispensing of the Holy Spirit here is through anointing (χρῖσμα), and the agent of the process is unclear, simply being referred to by the author of the letter as ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου, lit., from the Holy One, which may refer either to God or Jesus. If this reference reflects the event in John 20:22, then Jesus will become the agent of the anointing (as in CEV and GNT)[19] demonstrating the fact that the Johannine eschatology does not stand on the eschatological period of harmony that Brown proposes. Rather, John seems to anticipate a *conflict eschatology*, that is, in the last days, the disciples must brace for a conflict with the antichrist and his minions. John's eschatology is not to be realized inside the upper room, but a call to readiness to face the opposition outside of the room, hence, the collective fear of the disciples illustrated by the locked doors of John 20:19 and 26. John may have hinted about conflict eschatology in 11:53 in the way time is indicated here (ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνης οὖν τῆς ἡμέρας, lit., therefore, from that day) when Jesus withdrew from the world as his response to its hostility. Jesus even revealed to his disciples what awaits them outside in John 16:33, ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλῖψιν ἔχετε, lit., in the world you have tribulation.

Conflict eschatology may help clarify the meaning of peace in John's Gospel. A description of this peace is provided in John 14:27. Jesus had a term for this peace; he called this peace εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν, lit., my peace. Because Jesus was the source of this peace, he could freely

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[18] Haas, et al, *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* 1972, https://demo-tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-1-john-218/.

[19] See Contemporary English Version (CEV), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020%3A22&version=CEV; and Good News Translation (GNT), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020%3A22&version=GNT.

dispense it to his disciples. This peace is different from the kind that the world gives (οὐ καθὼς ὁ κόσμος δίδωσιν, lit., not as the world gives). The world's understanding of peace is the absence of war or strife, or a threat to one's existence. Jesus' peace thrives even in the conditions of conflict. Jesus' peace flourishes and succeeds even in times of troubles and tribulations. Jesus' peace is not dependent on outward circumstances for it is the condition of the heart and the mind. Jesus' peace is the absence of worry and cowardice (μὴ ταρασσέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδία μηδὲ δειλιάτω, lit., do not let your heart be troubled; do not be cowardly). The peace that Jesus speaks is, therefore, the quietness of the heart or the peace of mind amidst tribulation. This kind of peace seems to lean more towards the psychological dimension of peace. C.K. Barrett sees this peace as "the absence of fear and perturbation of the heart; and that is the gift of Christ alone."[20]

Jesus' peace is the type of peace that would assist the disciples to tide them over the approaching tribulation and persecution. This is very well expressed in John 16:31–33. In this passage, Jesus told his followers of the coming break-up of the group, each retreating to the comforts of home and abandoning Jesus at the very hour of his passion. Knowing beforehand about the disciples' forthcoming failure does not amount to an open rebuke of their relapse; the tone of the passage tells otherwise. Jesus' peace statement in John 16:33 gives the disciples a foreknowledge that would prepare them for a more optimistic outcome; peace in the face of violent opposition that they would shortly encounter in John 20:19 ff. Jesus' peace of John 14:27 and John 16:33 becomes an alert word to the peace statements in John 20:19, 21, and 26, reminding them that they already possessed Jesus' peace despite the noise and the rambling of the murderous opposition. J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin offer this view,

[20] C.K. Barret, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text,* 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 468.

> … the emphasis given by its repetition at verses 21 and 26 suggests a reference back to 14:27 and 16:33.[21]

This last piece of the peace puzzle in John has completed the picture of the phrase "Peace with you". Jesus' peace, therefore, is the inner serenity that comes from the words that the Lord had revealed to his emotionally unstable group of confused and fearful disciples before experiencing themselves the violence that would be instigated by the religious authorities.

What is the function then of "Peace with you" in John 20:19, 21, and 26? Is it a peace greeting or more than a traditional Jewish greeting?

Peace Be With You in John 20:19-29: A Greeting or More Than a Greeting

It is worth noting that the peace phrase is used in the New Testament about 24 times.[22] The most common form appears to be grace to you and peace (lit., χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη), which was employed thirteen times in the whole corpus.[23] Because of the preponderance of the forms of the peace formula in the NT, efforts were expended to track both its forms and functions. Brown notes that there were peace formulas that employed a verbal form, and there were also instances when a verbal form was absent[24] The first type, distinguishable by the presence of a verb, is illustrated by the following examples: δῴη ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην, lit., he may give peace to you (2 Thess 3:16); ἔσται μεθ' ἡμῶν χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη, lit., it will be with us grace, mercy, peace (2 John 1:3). The second type may be classified as a nominal-pronominal peace formula where a verb is absent and a noun-pronoun combination completes the phrase. This construction appears five times in the

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[21] J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin, The Gospel according to St. John, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), 431.

[22] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 85.

[23] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 85.

[24] Brown, *The Gospel according to John XII-XXI,* 2021.

second person plural dative (Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19, 21, 26 and 1 Pet 5:14) and once in second person singular dative (εἰρήνη σοι, 3 Jn 1:15). The plural form also appears in this expression, Εἰρήνη τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, lit., "peace to the brothers," found in Eph 6:23.

What makes this distinction so important and necessary in this endeavor? The reason is that the form determines the function of the peace formula. The verbal peace salutation, by virtue of the presence of a verb in the formula, expresses a note of certainty that is stronger than the note of wish or possibility.[25] Thus, in 2 John 1:3, it functions as an assurance to the believers that they will receive the peace whose source is God and Jesus Christ. In 2 Thess 3:16, it functions as a supplication whereby the Lord of peace, i.e., Jesus, would grant peace to the community of the faithful. The nominal-pronominal form may either function as a statement of a fact or as an expression of a wish. C. Haas et al, in discussing the meaning of the peace greeting in 3 John 1:15, underscore the fact that "(t)he Greek construction of two nouns not connected by a verb may serve to express a fact or a wish."[26] The nominal-pronominal form appears 6 times in the New Testament (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, and 26; 1 Peter 5:14 and 3 John 1:15) and is normally understood as a wish.

This distinction is necessary because the peace formula is almost always rendered "Peace be with you". The effect would be that this translation dampens the rhetorical effect of the nominal-pronominal form when it inserts the verb "be" so that peace becomes a wish. As a wish, this translation forwards the idea of a desire that peace be restored or granted in a situation where it is lacking or absent. However, the narrative structure of John 20 does not seem to encourage such a reading.

[25] Brown, *The Gospel according to John XII-XXI,* 2021.

[26] Haas, et al., *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* 1972, https://tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-3-john-115/.

Peace Be With you: Probable Meanings in John 20:19–29

In John 20:19–29, the peace formula does not seem to suggest a wish function but rather appears to be making a statement of fact that in the last days, the risen Jesus is the dispenser of peace. The evangelist witnesses to Jesus as the source of true or genuine peace. As the source of peace, the risen Lord can give and distribute it to his disciples, as John 14:27 suggests. Because Jesus is both the source and giver or distributor of peace, he can rightly demand or command his disciples to apply in their lives the type of peace that he dispenses among his disciples in John 20:19, 21, and 26. Jesus' peace stabilizes the soul at a time of prospective difficulty inherent in the persecution to come.

How can one understand the peace phrase in the context of the narrative of John 20? There are several contextual clues that the evangelist left for his readers to decipher if one is to understand the events reported there as well as the peace formulas that are scattered in certain key parts of the story, especially in verses 19, 21, and 26. In verse 19 alone, the Gospel writer employs several "contextual codes" that suggest a meaning other than what they seem to impart on the surface. John starts with the temporal element, Οὔσης οὖν ὀψίας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ (lit. So, it was evening on that day). Because the evangelist John is a skillful employer of a literary technique known as dualism in his Gospel, the terminology or concepts that he employed may be infused with theological implications. For instance, the word that he preferred to describe the time of the day when this event happened, ὀψίας, lit., evening, had some theological associations. For John, evening is associated with the darkness of the night, where darkness is opposed to light. When one traces the theological link in the mind of the evangelist, darkness as light's opposite may also be suggestive of death as against life and the lies of the opposition versus the truth of Jesus. Thus, evening in the temporal clause of verse 19 may not be simply suggestive of time but indicative of chaos at the moment of Jesus' death.

That John was thinking more than time in this temporal clause of verse 19 was revealed in the second part of the clause, τῇ μιᾷ σαββάτων,

lit., on the first of the week. John seems to allude to the creation event of Genesis 1, where God's first creative act was the separation of darkness/chaos and light/order. Here, on the first day of the week, when it was still evening, chaos reigned among the disciples as illustrated by the locked doors and their corporate fear of the Jewish authorities as they huddled inside the upper room. The evangelist seems to be saying more when he mentions this temporal clause for the second time. He employed it for the first time in his opening of Chapter 20. Following the Genesis creation account, it was early on the first day of the week that the first ray of light broke through the darkness of the night (πρωὶ σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης) when Mary Magdalene found the tomb empty. It was not a coincidence but a deliberate theological statement that on the first day of the week, Jesus is risen! The evangelist masterfully linked light with life, and so was fulfilled the prophecy of John 1:5: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The chaos of the evening of the first day of the week is now dealt with by the order established by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had just subdued the ultimate enemy, death. Then, Jesus appeared among the disciples proclaiming, Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, lit., "Peace to you". How significant is this peace statement in the context of verse 19? Verse 19 is quite clear that the fear of the disciples came from no other reason but fear of the Jews (τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων). "Peace to you" here is not a salutation but is performing an exhortative function. Leon Morris seems to concur with this observation when he writes that he sees more than a conventional greeting in Jesus' peace statement.[27] The peace statement seems to address the fear of the disciples. Thus, peace with you in verse 19 may tend to bring the readers back to Jesus' words in John 14:1, 27, where the peace of Jesus is clarified to mean, "Do not let your hearts be troubled; and do not be afraid."

Jesus uttered the same peace phrase in John 20:21. This utterance happened after the risen Lord revealed his wounded hands and sides to his very surprised followers. The Gospel writer reports that there was

[27] Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 745.

a visible shift in the disciples' mood from fear to rejoicing (ἐχάρησαν, lit., they rejoiced) when they saw their Lord very much alive in their midst. What follows next is Jesus' words of commissioning of the disciples, which were patterned after the Father's sending the Son into the world. The peace formula of verse 21 seems to lead his readers back to Jesus' words in John 15:16 and 16:6. In the first passage, Jesus revealed to the disciples that it was through his sovereign choice that they became his followers and that he "appointed them to go and bear much fruit." Jesus was in effect commissioning the disciples for the first time in 15:16. But because Jesus revealed all these things including his forthcoming departure from the world, this brought sorrow to the hearts of his disciples (16:6). The repetition of the peace phrase in 20:21 becomes a reassurance to the disciples of Jesus' "real presence and a renewal of their commission as disciples."[28] However, Jesus' commissioning of the disciples would involve going outside of the locked upper room where conflict with the opposition awaits them (16:33b). Jesus exhorted the disciples to be brave because he had already defeated the world (v.33c). Thus, by being forewarned, the disciples would experience peace only if they would remain united with Jesus (v.33a). The peace phrase of verse 21 would have served as a kind of alert word bringing the disciples back to Jesus' words in 15:16, 16:6 and 33. "Peace with you" in John 20:21 would have meant, "Be brave," or "Be of good cheer."

The third occasion of Jesus' "Peace with you" statement took place a week after Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to the disciples in the locked upper room. The evangelist's framing of the event in the context of Thomas' unbelief (John 20:25) appears to parallel the accounts of John 16:31–33, where the disciples' inability to comprehend Jesus' figures of speech (16:25, 29–30) is indicative of their collective unbelief. "Peace with you" in John 20:26 would have meant "Take courage" or "Be brave," which has the effect of intensifying Jesus' direct exhortation to Thomas in John 20:27, "Do not doubt but believe" (καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός, lit., and not become unbelieving but believing).

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[28] Merrill Tenney, "John," in *NIV Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 370.

Jesus' peace statement in John 20 appears to be making the following statements about the evangelist's concept of peace. First, the Johannine concept of peace seems to be tied up with his view on eschatology, particularly by his *conflict eschatology*. Second, John seems to infuse psychological values or meanings to his idea and usage of peace as demonstrated in the six instances that this concept appeared in the whole of the Gospel, where peace is closely associated with fear and unbelief. Third, the peace statements in John 20.19, 21, and 26 were intended by the evangelist to function more as a statement of fact than as a wish.

Alternative Meaning of the Peace Greetings in Filipino or Tagalog

From the discussion above, it is discerned that the evangelist intends to employ the word "peace" (εἰρήνη) in its psychological sense rather than theologically. John is simply being consistent in his presentation of Jesus in his Gospel as someone who possessed exceptional knowledge of human nature, as John 2:24–25 suggests.[29] The Johannine concept of peace appears to point to the fact that Jesus is the true source of peace for his disciples. Jesus' peace is the quietness of the heart or the peace of mind in the face of the violence that the forthcoming persecution would bring. In the time of persecution, Jesus would no longer be physically around to guide and comfort them, so the only way to appropriate this peace is by staying united with the True Vine. Since Jesus is the source and dispenser of genuine peace, he could make a demand on how this peace should be applied. Thus, the "Peace with you" statements in John 20 would be performing an exhortative or command function rather than as a peace greeting. Unlike the "Peace be with you" of Luke 24:36 (also 1:28), which does not lay down any predicate at all but is abruptly introduced into the narrative and so must be construed as a Jewish salutation, the same cannot be said of John. "Peace with you" is clearly not a greeting here.

[29] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 84.

Peace with you is almost always translated literally in Filipino, or in Tagalog, "*Sumainyo ang kapayapaan*". It is a one-to-one correspondence with the source language (Greek or English). Since it is a formal translation of the peace statement, what function is it performing in the vernacular? Is it a greeting or is it an exhortation? *Sumainyo ang kapayapaan* does not appear to be a proper Filipino or Tagalog salutation primarily because it is not used for greeting someone except within the context of the liturgy. It cannot be taken as words of exhortation either, as it neither urges nor encourages someone to move or act in a certain way. *Sumainyo ang kapayapaan*, therefore, does not meet the narrative demands or expectations of John 20.19ff. because it is an artificial construction.

The movement or the transpiring of events in John 20 leads to the highest point in the story where the resurrected Christ appeared to his disciples inside the locked doors of the upper room in verses 19-26. Here, the reader anticipates not a peace greeting but remarks that may tend to alleviate the disciples' crisis of faith. Thus, in John 20:19, "Peace be with you" would have meant "*Huminahon kayo* (Calm down or Be calm)" or "*Lakasan ninyo ang loob ninyo* (Take heart)" or "*Huwag kayong matakot* (Do not be afraid)."

Jesus pronounced the peace phrase in John 20:21 in a changed circumstance. The corporate mood inside the room has shifted from fear in John 20:19 to joy. Jesus followed up his peace statement with a word of commissioning of the disciples in a manner that was patterned after the Father sent Jesus to the world. This appears to function as a reminder of Jesus' word of prior commissioning of the disciples in 15:16. What follows was the bequeathing of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins to the disciples in verses 22–23. Given this context, "Peace with you" would have meant "*Magalak kayo* (be of good cheer)."

"Peace with you" in John 20:26 seems to repeat the intended function of the peace formula in John 20:19. The joyful disposition of verse 21 dissipates, and the fear of verse 19 is suddenly relived. The locked doors were suggestive of the collective fear of the disciples.

The unbelief of Thomas even compounded the fear of the disciples. The same evidence that Jesus presented to the disciples seven days ago was the same proof or witness that he is alive was shown to Thomas to dispel all his doubts. "Peace with you" may mean "*Lakasan ninyo ang loob ninyo* (Take heart)" or "*Huwag kayong matakot* (Do not be afraid)" or "*Sumampalataya ka at huwag mag-alinlangan* (Believe and do not doubt)."

Jesus' peace statements addressed a faith community in crisis during the first century of the common era. How effective or relevant would they be in meeting the challenges of the contemporary time that threaten the very existence of a faith community, i.e., the United Methodist Church?

The Peace Greetings of John: A Call to Courage in the Face of a Possible Permanent and Painful Church Split

The pressing issues that gnaw bit by bit on the very existence of The United Methodist Church (UMC) come from inside the Church itself. These issues can be classified into three groups of serious "gripes," namely, theological/ethical, ideological, and political (Church polity).

The first grave challenge threatening the United Methodist Church comes from a group that called itself The Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), which launched a 'separatist or disaffiliated' denomination known as The Global Methodist Church (GMC). The decision to separate from the UMC commenced with its determination to rescind its initial agreement to the temporary measure arrived at in early 2020 to hold in "abeyance on submitting or processing complaints related to homosexuality until after a process for separation had been approved and the denominations that may result from it could hold their post separation General Conferences."[30] The GMC sought to

[30] Ask the UMC, a ministry of United Methodist Communications, "What Is the Church's Position on Homosexuality?" September 24, 2019, https://www.umc.org. See also "FAQs on Legislation," https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/faqs-legislation; and "Legislation," https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/legislation.

uphold the theological and ethical Christian orthodoxy.[31] This meant that the disaffiliated church "opposed the recognition of same-sex marriage and the ordination of non-celibate gay clergy."[32]

This concern should not be an issue that must rip the Church into splinter groups. The United Methodist Church affirms that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons.[33] Thus, it advocates inclusiveness in the Church where members may live out their faith through their local church irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity and believes human rights are due to all people, regardless of sexual orientation.[34] There is, however, a caveat against a liberal interpretation of the position of the Church on homosexuality. The United Methodist Church makes a distinction between sexual orientation and practice or behavior. The Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.[35] Since 1972, this Church's position was upheld at every General Conference until 2019, but in 2020, the General Conference removed this language, reversing a 52-year ban.

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[31] See "Global Methodist Church," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Methodist_Church.

[32] See "Global Methodist Church," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Methodist_Church.

[33] Ask the UMC. See also Taylor W. Burton Edwards, "What is the Church's Position on Homosexuality?" https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-churchs-position-on-homosexuality.

[34] Ask the UMC. See "Social Principles – The Social Community," *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2020/2024,* https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-social-community#human-sexuality. It says: "We support the rights of all people to exercise personal consent in sexual relationships, to make decisions about their own bodies and be supported in those decisions, to receive comprehensive sexual education, to be free from sexual exploitation and violence, and to have access to adequate sexual health care."

[35] Ask the UMC. See also Peter Smith, "United Methodists Remove Anti-Gay Language from Their Official Teachings on Societal Issues," *Associated Press,* May 3, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/methodists-lgbtq-samesex-marriage-gay-rights-e3a7677a3b025b07211153179727c255.

The United Methodist Church's stance on homosexuality alienated a sizable portion of its membership. The LGBTQ advocates argued for the inclusion of homosexuals in all aspects of life in the Church. The Church rightly acknowledged that the 12 million United Methodists scattered all over the world "are not of one mind" on the issue, so it allowed its membership to disagree with the Church's position and to openly express a change in ecclesial policy. In early 2020, the competing groups agreed to adopt the following steps, namely, (1) an abeyance or delay on submitting or processing complaints, and (2) to submit and advocate among their constituencies for legislation creating a process for separation.[36] The second part of the decision allows a peaceful separation from the Mother Church without completely severing ecclesial relationships in the event of a failure to arrive at a consensus on the issue at hand. These temporary measures were arrived at until the General Conference makes a full decision on the homosexuality question in 2028. Meanwhile, in the interval, the General Conference of 2024 adopted *regionalization*. Regionalization is a measure that allows each Central Conference, regional bodies of UMC churches outside of the United States, to adopt a policy that accords with the legal, cultural, and social contexts of host communities/nations. This measure provides a sort of limited autonomy for national United Methodist Churches to address the homosexuality issue on a case-by-case basis. Rev. Edwards, a UMC clergy, calls regionalization "connectionalism (basic ecclesial relationships/polity within the UMC- RMA) customized to enhance local effectiveness."[37] Regionalization appears to be a Solomonic decision arrived at by the General Conference in the meantime until a more definitive and permanent decision will be made in 2028.

The Philippine United Methodist Church (PUMC) exercised the benefits provided by regionalization. The PUMC affirms the long-

[36] Ask the UMC. See https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/faqs-legislation.

[37] Taylor W. Burton Edwards, "Regionalization, Series Part 2: Regionalization Is Customization," https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-regionalization-part-2/.

standing position of the Church since 1972. The Philippine Church promotes inclusiveness while maintaining the traditional limitations imposed on the practice of homosexuality inside its confines. This confusing and somewhat contradictory position of the Church is indicative of its struggle in balancing the contending perspectives and interests among the progressives, centrists, and traditionalists in its general membership.

The conservative, evangelical-leaning faction of the Philippine Church followed the lead of its American counterparts by declaring that it would no longer wait for the General Conference of 2028 and decided to pursue a different path of disaffiliation. Disaffiliation is the extreme action of terminating the group's affiliation with The United Methodist Church. This group called the new organization Global Methodist Church (GMC) after the U.S. name of the disaffiliated Church. The influential leaders of the group took some ingenious but foul ways of taking over control of the church's properties while barring the entry of those who remained in the UMC inside the church premises. The real owner of the properties, the UMC, was even forbidden to use the church sanctuary for worship. The group resorted to slander and the propagation of fake news concerning the UMC and its bishops as Satanic and purveyors of homosexuality.

Aside from this staunch anti-homosexuality group, another faction motivated by its desire to cut its connection with the United States Church is threatening the stability of the UMC. This group calls itself the Filipino Methodist Church, whose main program is "Autonomy now!" The drive for autonomy is fueled by a nationalistic ideology and polity- a church that is free to chart its own future and ministry without seeking the nod or approval of the Mother Church in the United States.

This is the dilemma confronting The United Methodist Church. How relevant is the Johannine peace formula in the UMC experience? Since Jesus' peace statements in the Gospel of John are framed within the context of adversity, the more they gain credence as the Church deals with its own challenges. In the same way that Jesus' peace allayed the fears of the disciples, the same peace can address the confusion

and panic within the faith community that stares at the prospects of corporate disintegration. How can The United Methodist Church appropriate Jesus' peace in the present time?

"Peace with you" is a call to The United Methodist Church not to be afraid to face the issues squarely and decisively. "Peace with you" would have meant for the United Methodists the following:

Do not be afraid to admit that the issue of homosexuality is a complex phenomenon, and the Bible may not provide adequate answers to the problem. Homosexuality is a very complex issue. Recent research informs us that homosexuality is not only a question of nurture but of nature as well.[38] The various types of homosexuality, i.e., LGBTQ +, are clues about the immensity and breadth of the subject matter. Homosexuality may best be framed as a biological question rather than as a theological supposition. The point being that the source of theological reflection, the Bible, does not provide useful information that may help untangle this Gordian knot. To admit this fact requires courage in this age of misplaced spirituality. The UMC must inform its constituencies that the Bible, though witnessing to the God of History working through its various literary genres, may be reflective of a long-gone time and so must be reflective of the concerns of the period. Homosexuality may not be an issue that the Bible writers may have reflected upon extensively because it was not a pressing question to the people of God at that time. Thus, the Bible may not be a good resource to address the issue. However, the teachings about God that inform the biblical narrative or poetry, etc., like his concern for the marginalized and the oppressed, may be taken into consideration to guide our faith and practice.

Do not be afraid to seek help from the disciplines of medicine and science to help fill up the gap in the biblical teachings.[39] The Bible does not claim that

[38] See Kimberly Cornuelle, "Nature vs. Nurture: The Biology of Sexuality," *BU Today,* November 16, 2010, https://www.bu.edu/articles/2010/nature-vs-nurture-the-biology-of-sexuality/.

[39] See, for example, Andrea Rinaldi, "I Was Born This Way: New Research Confirms That a Mix of Prenatal Factors and Genetic Differences Could Explain

it has the answer to all human problems. Only Christians make this claim. This is spiritual pride that makes meaningful conversation and mutual understanding impossible. The Church must seek the guidance and insights of medical and scientific experts to inform the UMC about homosexuality to make an intelligent position and decision on the matter. The Bible is not at odds with science and medicine. Science and medicine may help fill up the gaps in the biblical knowledge of aeons past.

Do not be afraid to take a position on the issue.[40] A position informed by the Bible and by science/medicine will put the UMC on a solid ground. A well-informed Church is not afraid to make a stance on any issues including homosexuality. A courageous Church stands firm because it knows that its position is supported by information provided by various disciplines. The Church, standing on a sure footing, will expose the barrenness of logic, shallowness of thesis, and ignorance of the opposition.

Do not be afraid to apply the gospel principles of acceptance, forgiveness, and understanding to guide the Church's actions in dealing with the issue.[41] The

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Human Sexual Orientation," EMBO Reports 23, no. 6 (May 16, 2022): e55290, https://doi.org/10.15252/embr.202255290; See also American Psychological Association, "Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality," October 29, 2008, https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation.

[40] "Homosexuality: 2020/2024 Book of Discipline Statements," United Methodist Church, https://www.umc.org/en/content/homosexuality-full-book-of-discipline-statements#:~:text=Persons%20who%20have%20been%20terminated,to%20the%20new%20appointment%20year. See also "Agreement: Statement of Principles," *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring,* https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/the-agreement.

[41] See Peter Smith, "United Methodists Remove Anti-Gay Language from Their Official Teachings on Societal Issues," *Associated Press,* May 3, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/methodists-lgbtq-samesex-marriage-gay-rights-e3a7677a3b025b07211153179727c255. See also Joseph Liu, "Religious Groups' Official Positions on Same-Sex Marriage," Pew Research Center, December 7, 2012, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/; and Michael Lipka and David Masci, "Where

gospels agree in their presentation of Jesus as one who accepts the refuse of society, namely, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the lepers, the hemorrhaging woman, etc. For sinners, the necessary step that he required of them was to repent. Repentance brings forgiveness. For those who were ill, Jesus asked them to believe in him. Acceptance and fellowship were made available by Jesus to those who were not even considered humans by the religious authorities. This is not to say that homosexuality is a sin that needs to be repented of. Homosexuals are created by God, too. However, because they do not fall into the strict male and female categories, the "normal ones" look askance at them. Some old and traditional families are hard on them; closed societies make them objects of ridicule. Some fundamentalist and evangelical Christian Churches have labeled them immoral and sinners so that they are excluded from their fellowships. Will Jesus' example of acceptance not find a place in the Church? Will Jesus' Church be a party to their rejection? If Jesus were alive today, he would have welcomed the rejected and despised homosexuals.

Do not be afraid to stand up against judgmentalism, self-righteousness, and rejection of marginalized people by legalistic religion.[42] Jesus stood with the masses, especially those being debased by the Temple authorities, as less than humans. Jesus' quarrels with the Pharisees and the scribes emanated from their strict reading and interpretation of God's Law. Jesus approached the Law according to its spirit and intention rather than by its letters. Jesus' appreciation of the Law made him accept the unacceptable and embrace the unembraceable. This was the legacy of Jesus to the Church. The Church should not be a party to the

Christian Churches, Other Religions Stand on Gay Marriage," *Pew Research Center,* December 21, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/.

[42] See Joseph Liu, "Religious Groups' Official Positions on Same-Sex Marriage," *Pew Research Center,* December 7, 2012, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/; Michael Lipka and David Masci, "Where Christian Churches, Other Religions Stand on Gay Marriage," *Pew Research Center,* December 21, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/.

rejection of homosexuals. It should not be fast in passing judgments on their homosexual behavior or practice. This issue cannot be simply dismissed as sinful, especially in light of the new scientific discoveries. Nevertheless, there is also human convention to consider. The Church should learn to tread this fine line between the spirit of the Gospel and human tradition/conventionality. The answer is not easy. It could only provide a provisional answer that can be amended in the future. The current position of the Church, inclusivity tempered by the community's moral and social values and the laws of the land, may be a reasonable ground to stand on at the moment.

Conclusion

"Peace be with you" in John 20.19-29 is better translated and understood as "Peace is with you." The former functions as a greeting while the latter is a statement of fact. The determination that Jesus' peace statement is a factual statement largely stands on the Greek construction of the peace formula Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, lit., peace to you. The nominal-pronominal (dative) construction allows its reading as a statement of fact. The reason why this is overly emphasized is that, as a statement of fact, the greeting points to Jesus as the source of peace. Jesus, being the source of peace, can dispense peace to his disciples and likewise, can command or demand from them a specific course of action, such as "Do not be afraid" and/or "Be of good cheer". In the context of the impending violence from the religious authorities, Jesus assures his disciples that his peace is with them so that they need not be afraid.

"Peace is with you," as a statement of fact, goes far beyond the peace statement of Jesus to his disciples in the first century CE. It still rings true today, especially when a community of faith, like the United Methodist Church, faces crisis situations that threaten its very existence. "Peace is with you," reminds the Church not to be afraid because Jesus' peace thrives in situations of distress and trouble. Jesus' peace is not the absence of strife but the instilling of peace of the soul when times are difficult.

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RESTING TO LISTEN: REFLECTIONS ON THE CORDILLERAN HERITAGE OF *"TE-ER"* AND THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF "REST"[1]

Oscar Alunday, S.V.D. and Edgar Ebojo

Abstract. In today's busy world, rest is rare and often seen as a personal need for mental health. However, should rest always be viewed as only for individuals? Does it relate to the Church's life? What role does rest play in synodality and spreading God's Word? Our Te-Er experience in Sadanga, Mountain Province, highlighted how important rest is for deeper listening to God's message. In this contribution, an overview of the Cordilleran concept of *Te-Er* or rest will be presented and related to some of the biblical notions of rest in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Keywords: rest, re/creation, Psalm 95, Epistle to the Hebrews, Mt 11:28

[1] This paper is an updated version of a paper (of the same title) first presented at the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines' (CBAP) Silver Jubilee Celebration and Annual Convention, September 20, 2024; La Paz, Iloilo City. It is our initial attempt to examine this Cordilleran (Sadangan) heritage through the theological lens of biblical practices of and teachings on "rest".

Introduction

In our fast-paced modern world, "rest" is a very expensive commodity that few people enjoy, and when availed, it is almost always viewed as individualistic, personal, and essential for keeping one's sanity amidst a highly convoluted and chaotic world. But should the need for rest always be conceived as personal? Does it always need to be for one's personal benefit? Does rest have anything to do with the life of the Church? What does rest contribute to the discussion of synodality and the proclamation of the Word of God? Our experience of the Te-Er in Sadanga, Mountain Province, was a big eye-opener as to how significant "rest" can be in making us listen (more intently) to the Word of God.

Te-Er as a Pathway to Intently Listening to God's Voice: A Cultural Awakening

A. "YBA Kami Para Sa Tanan!"

Inspired by the principle of synodality, "Youth Bible Apostolate kami para sa tanan!" was the clarion call of the Episcopal Commission on Biblical Apostolate (ECBA)'s 25th National Bible Workshop on February 19–22, 2024, held at the Mandaya Hotel, Davao City, and participated in by 268 Bible apostles from fourteen regional biblical centers. We witnessed the zeal, creativity, and talents of the youth in bringing out the power of the Word in their lives. Inspired by the youth, we went home invigorated by the faith-life experiences of the young Bible apostles.

From Davao City, I (Ebojo) returned to Luzon and joined a team of Bible translation personnel from the Philippine Bible Society (PBS)[2] and the Translators Association of the Philippines (TAP),[3] visiting Tabuk City (Kalinga Province), the Municipalities of Conner

[2] Members of the PBS Team include Rev. Marfeal Santiago (PBS Translation Supervisor), Phoebe Cantal, Charity Rulloda, and Kuya Dario Esponilla.

[3] Rev. Joseph Villaflor (TAP Director), Tony Dasalla, and Kuya Dodong.

(Apayao Province), Sadanga (Mountain Province), and Malibcong and Boliney (Abra Province), for a 10-day language research and relationship-building mission. Before entering any diocesan jurisdiction, we paid our courtesy[4] to the bishops (Most Rev. Prudencio Andaya, Jr. CICM, D.D. [Diocese of Tabuk], Most Rev. Valentin Dimoc,[5] D.D. [Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe], and Most Rev. Leopoldo Jaucian, SVD, D.D.[6] [Diocese of Bangued]) and local Evangelical and mainline protestant church leaders, and asked for their collective blessings, especially for the new translation endeavour that we would be embarking on. The blessings of the bishops and other local Church leaders are an important element of our journey in the United Bible Societies-Nida Institute's Cornerstone program for a holistic approach to translation, but with initial focus on Oral Bible Translation (OBT).[7]

B. "Inte-er taku, Kakailyan"

On February 27, from the House of the Bishop of Bontoc, we proceeded to one of the potential project sites, that is, the town of Sadanga, about an hour ride from Bontoc town (but about 500 kilometres away from Manila). The Municipality of Sadanga[8] is a fifth-

[4] Copies of translated Scriptures into Cordilleran mother tongues were presented to them, courtesy of PBS and TAP.

[5] Bishop Valentin Dimoc, D.D., an Ifugao priest, chairs the Episcopal Commission of Indigenous People (ECIP) of the CBCP.

[6] As Bishop Jaucian was out of town, Rev. Fr. Samuel Baruela, the Diocesan Chancellor, welcomed the team on his behalf.

[7] Out of this language research trip, four oral Bible translation teams were eventually formed: the Conner "Isneg" team (Apayao), the Abra-Kalinga "Vanao" team, the Abra "Masadiit" team, and the "Sadanga" team (Mountain Province).

[8] Sadanga had its first seat of government at Barangay Sacasacan with Bekigan, Belwang and Saclit as its barangays. Pursuant to the Provincial Board Resolution no. 592, dated October 14, 1949, of the old Mountain Province, barangays Anabel and Betwagan were added as barangays of Sacasacan. But on June 25, 1963, through the Executive Order No. 42 of then President Diosdado Macapagal, Sadanga became a regular municipality. Prior to this, however, "Sadanga" was a former sitio of Barangay Sacasacan which was then renamed to "Barangay

class municipality under the political jurisdiction of Mountain Province, Philippines. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) 2020 census, Sadanga has a population of 8,427 people, distributed among the eight barangays.

In terms of geo-politics, Sadanga plays an important role in hosting the commencement of the peace talks between the "Cory" Government and the late Fr. Conrado Balweg and his Cordillera Peoples' Liberation Army (CPLA), that led to the creation of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

It was already dark when we ascended the Sadanga mountains from the main highway and reached the plaza of the municipal building a little before 6:00 pm. Even without prior notice, we were received joyfully by Mayor Adolf Ganggangan, who was still very busy working even after office hours. We enjoyed the overflowing supply of the native hot brewed coffee as we listened attentively to his captivating stories about the uniqueness, the beauty, and the resiliency of the cultural heritage of the Sadanga people. He narrated spontaneously the brief history of the municipality, opening for us anthropological windows to better appreciate the socio-political-cultural-economic realities of his people. As we listened intently to the Mayor, he stopped abruptly upon hearing a public announcement (through the town trompa) by a male elder at 6:00 in the late afternoon:

> "*Inte-er taku asha ay matchem sina asha ay oras na a las ocho*" ("Let it be known to everyone that we will observe the Te-Er beginning tonight at 8:00 p.m.").

This announcement would forever change our appreciation of "rest." All the employees at the Mayor's office understood the message. They were ready to leave immediately after the announcement. Our team wondered what the announcement was all about, as it was given

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Poblacion" and became the seat of the newly created municipality. On July 30, 1985, through the Provincial Ordinance No. 02, Barangay Demang was created also and added to Sadanga. Hence, the Municipality of Sadanga is now comprised by eight barangays: Anabel, Bekigan, Belwang, Betwagan, Demang, Poblacion, Saclit, and Sacasacan (where our TAP team stayed for the night).

only once. Seeing our confused faces, the Mayor must have realised our honest ignorance and wanted to salvage our honour, so he patiently explained to us the urgency of the announcement for immediate public compliance by everybody, including guests who are already in town. The three-day "*Te-Er*" was about to commence at 8:00 p.m. that evening.

The Mayor enlightened us about the protocols[9] of the Te-Er days, thus:

- At the entrance of the town, there are two signboards (fayavey) on opposite sides of the road indicating that *Te-Er* is in effect (which our Team sorely missed noticing).
- Usually, there are elderly women at the entrance of the town who make sure that no one enters the town especially "foreigners and strangers," and equally no one is allowed to leave the town during the three-day *Te-Er*.
- During *Te-Er*, no one is allowed to do manual work. One may walk sparingly only around his/her own backyard.
- Every offender against the rule of grounding, restriction of travel and movement is *punished* accordingly by the community Elders, either by making them to give in kind or in cash—the proceeds of which would be for the use of the community.

Under this restrictive context, the Mayor wisely advised us to leave the place discreetly very early in the morning, the following day. Then he bowed his head and requested our blessing and prayers, especially for peace ("*kapiya*") to end boundary disputes in the three barangays

[9] We would later learn that the enforcement of the *Te-Er* begins with a meeting of the Council of Elders within the center of the town. The Council negotiates with its members on whether they should close the village or not, and when. Once a collective decision has been reached, the Elders will drink their traditional wine and one of the Elders will announce the decision via public statement, which can be heard throughout the village valley. The tradition is made so that for a period of time, the Sadanga townsfolk can rest from their daily routine work, and deliberately have the opportunity to converse and strengthen their bonds with each other through public engagement with their neighbors and with the spirits.

of the town. After our prayer, everyone hurried to move out of the *Municipio* (municipal office) to be home before 8:00 p.m.

C. An Evening of Revelation

From the *Municipio*, we walked slowly down the pathway leading to the Parish Convent and Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, where some of our team members would take shelter for the evening. As the parish priest, Rev. Fr. Ferdie Fulatao, was in Bontoc City that day, three local lady volunteers generously prepared our dinner and beddings for the night. But looking back, these women[10] did more than just "waiting" for us; they in fact further opened our hearts to the Te-Er tradition.

We listened carefully to Linda, Carmelita, and Juanita as they genuinely explained from their hearts their *Te-Er* culture. *Te-Er* is a practice that some of us have sporadically heard before this encounter, but this unique Sadangan tradition had not sunk deep into the cultural psyche. In turn, the women explained that *Te-Er* is a restful invocation of blessings for good harvest and good relationships in the community, and that Te-Er has different types:[11]

Te-Er si Khaat: This is the preparatory phase which involves the cleaning of the pathways in the village by household members.

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[10] Accordingly, the information in this section was augmented further by the later sharing of the three other women from Sadanga, who became members of the Sadanga Cornerstone-Oral Bible Translation, namely Norma Coriaen, Raymunda Sabong, and Rosa Wacnag.

[11] As the observance of *Te-Er* is also practiced elsewhere in the Cordillera (some call it *"teng-ao"*), the types of *Te-Er* may not be limited to the ones mentioned here. Due to the limited time in Sadanga, no attempt has been made to document these other types; see the "Community Management Plan for the Sadanga, Mountain Province, updated April 2019," accessed September 2024, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/41220/41220-013-ipp-en_26.pdf. For a comparison with the Central Bontoc's practice of *Te-Er,* see Magdalena Collod, *Og-ocod Ad Sangad-om Ya Adwan: Stories of Long Ago and Today* (Quezon City: Summer Institute of Linguistics – Philippines, Inc., 1975). The main difference between Sadanga and Central Bontoc's celebrations is the number of days; whereas the latter has two days, the former has three.

Te-Er si Chawis (chao-es): The following evening after *Khaat*, the elders would put six sticks with small pieces of grilled pork blessed (soaked) in rice wine at the entrance of the village community. They would proceed with the *Te-er Proper* if the "sign" is good, as indicated by the absence of insects (spiders) on the sticks. Or else they will repeat the ritual until the signs are favourable. The *Chawis Te-Er* signals the preparation of the rice fields and farms (cleaning, ploughing, fixing the water canals, etc.), usually done from September to December.

Te-Er si Rapu (December, January, February): After the 3-day rest, the farmer who planted the first seedling will be the first to plant in their rice fields, starting from the fields far from the community (*payew si ad-adawi*), moving to the fields near the houses (*payew si vavarey*). After everyone is finished with planting (harvesting), the *Ap-apoy* rite is performed in the fields. People bring cooked rice and enjoy the chicken or "*inasinan*" in the "*agamang*" (rice granary). This is a thanksgiving offering to God after work. In the evening of the same day, each household prepares a dinner with boiled chicken and invites neighbours/relatives to dine with the family for the *hung-up* meal – a rite asking for welfare and blessings for the family.

Te-Er si Sarakmut - *Te-Er di Erdad* (3 days): Celebrated before milling the sugarcane to produce sugar/wine/vinegar. During every *Te-er*, a team of men and women takes turns checking the houses (*Rapat*). If no one is at home, they get items like basins, buckets, etc., from the household as a penalty for leaving their houses. However, the elderly men get the items back by bartering with chickens, which are offered to *"Lumawig"* (the greatest of all spirits) at the *"papattayan"* space (sanctuary).

Te-Er si Pisik: A three-day rest before the start of the harvest. A ritual called *Wadey* is performed within three days before the harvest period. The ritual includes the erection of scarecrows in the rice fields that would indicate the "closure" of all passages of pests and diseases in the rice paddies. When the grains start to ripen, the "*serchang*" ritual is observed in anticipation of a good and fruitful harvest, usually falling in June and July. On the fourth day, the farmers (both men and

women) begin the most awaited harvest season. In case the harvest is not good, the community celebrates the *Fegnash*. Usually, pigs are butchered and prepared for meals. Each unit of the *"Ato"* (ceremonial platform) neighbourhood prepares lunch, supper, and breakfast for people to celebrate.

After the three-day of this *Te-er*, the people as a community go together either to plant or harvest in the fields/farms, starting from the farthest end of the land moving closer towards the fields near the community, according to the communitarian work ethic *"ub-ufu"* (or the equivalent of lowlanders' "*bayanihan*").

Te-Er di Far-in / Te-Er di Sherdey: This type of *Te-Er* is done for the prevention of the spread of diseases. This *Te-Er* was observed faithfully during the Covid-19 pandemic period as a customary method of quarantine. Everyone gives contributions either in kind or in cash to buy pigs, chickens, rice, and others to be cooked for distribution to all the homes in the community.

But what is the whole point of the *Te-Er*? The women explained the meaning of the celebration of the *Te-Er* tradition as a solemn celebration for the Mother Earth, to give her time to relax and rest, even for a while, to be able to re-energize and breathe again freely without being disturbed by anything or by anyone. This way, Mother Earth is deliberately afforded the needed space to regain her health and re-gather strength for a much-needed energy before the planting or harvesting seasons. The *Te-Er* days are periods of rejuvenation for Mother Earth. While Mother Earth is at rest, the farmers (women and men) are in effect communicating in sincere dialogue with the animals and pests, appealing to them not to destroy and infest their crops for the year—a scenario that ensures sustenance for the coming rainy season.

During *Te-Er*, the Sadanga people whisper intercessory prayers to the Creator God to order all the pests (e.g., destructive insects [as locusts, grasshoppers, etc.] and animals [rats, etc.]) not to infest or damage their plants and harvests. It is also a period of asking God, the Lord of the planting/harvesting seasons, the Giver of good harvest, to prevent infestation, to spare them from drought, and to drive away

bad weather that could tragically destroy their crops. In the same way, the *Te-Er* days enable the farmers to equally re-gather their strength and conserve their energy for the coming planting and harvesting tasks.

The *Te-Er* days are moments of communal contemplation of the goodness of the Creator, a period of deep conversation with the One who generously causes the seeds to delicately germinate and eventually grow into a robust and healthy plant, especially palay or rice grains, to ensure a continuing food supply for the community.

When the *Te-Er* ritual is not observed, the harvest becomes bad, with harmful insects and angry rats badly infesting the farms and fields. In effect, when the Te-Er is desecrated, the community's harvest is also desecrated. When this violation happens, food security becomes a threatening communal problem, resulting in a lack of food and widespread unhealthy living in the community. The environment becomes unproductive, causing unrest and anxiety among the members of the community. With the practice of *Te-Er*, Mother Earth can rest and become more receptive to nourishing the plants that would result in a healthy and abundant harvest, leading to a jubilant celebration of the people.

D. Rinebwangmi na Te-Er *("We broke the Te-Er")*

The *Te-Er* observance, however, is cancelled or postponed ("*maribwang na Te-Er sina erdad*") when it is desecrated ("*gapu ta madimek din Te-Er*"). Some of the reasons for cancellation include birth of a child, death in the community, "*no waday tilag*" (when a rainbow appears in the sky), and the unacceptable entry of foreigners/visitors into the community.

Accordingly, after we had our dinner (at exactly 8:00 p.m.), another public announcement was made through the town *trompa* (loudspeaker), "*Maipakaammo as Kakailyan ay adi matuloy na Te-Er asha ay rabi. As wakas na kasin taku ente-eran*" ("Let it be known to everyone that the observance of *Te-Er* will not push through tonight, but tomorrow evening"). We were so relieved with the new announcement, as to our unsuspecting mind, with the postponement of the *Te-Er* our TAP Team

could then freely stay in one of the *barrios* (i.e., Barangay Sacasacan) where limited movement was allowed, and our PBS team could move out freely to our next destination—the province of Abra.

But here's the embarrassing twist: We were politely made to understand that the postponement was actually caused by our non-observance of the NO-ENTRY rule during the newly announced *Te-Er* observance. The community Elders discovered that foreigners/strangers/outsiders entered the town without any prior notice. In our naiveté, our team desecrated the *Te-Er* ("*narebwangmi din erdad*" ["we desecrated the rest"]) because we were unconsciously ignorant of the cultural protocols in operation.

The evening was a difficult and hurtful revelation that we insensitively (albeit unintentionally) entered and violated the "sacred space and time" of a people who are sincerely listening to the voice of the Creator God in their communal silence and solitude during the *Te-Er* days. The evening was a good mix of restless and restful, feeling very tired and embarrassed by our ignorance of a tradition that is sacred to the Sadanga people. Nevertheless, the important lesson it left in us is the need to "listen." And we can only hear well when we are rested: WE NEEDED THE TE-ER!

Te-Er as Hearing the Voice of God: A Biblical Reflection

In the New Testament, no other invitation to "rest" is more profound than what Jesus Christ uttered in Matthew 11:28-29:[12]

> "Come to me, all you (plural) that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Put my yoke upon you (plural), and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you (plural) will find rest for your (plural) souls."[13]

[12] Hebrew and Greek texts used in this paper are from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,* 4th rev. ed., the common text of UBS *Greek New Testament,* 5th ed., and the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece,* 28th ed.

[13] Matt 11:28–29 "Δεῦτε πρός με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι, κἀγὼ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς. 11:29 ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πραΰς

This invitation is one of the most beloved Bible passages by Filipinos,[14] conveying the intimate message of finding rest in the loving and protective arms of Jesus, which does not necessarily immediately require technical expertise to decipher its meaning and its significance for oneself.

Yet, in this context, Jesus used the Greek term ἀναπαυσις.[15] The term usually connotes being physically refreshed after ceasing from activity or work, with focus on the "restorative character of rest" rather than mere cessation of activity. Whilst the language and imagery of this passage are physical at first look, its reception history tends to focus more on its psycho-spiritual significance: Jesus' unconditional invitation to have a restful "soul" in his affectionate and caring arms. However, what needs to be noted emphatically here is that this invitation was never meant to be an individualistic call, but a collective invitation for the community (note the plural forms) to enjoy the rest Jesus offers—it's a call to communal rest!

In Jesus, the call to enjoy communal rest is an invitation for the whole community to "come" to him as "fellow learners" ("put my yoke on you and learn from me" [ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε]), hence as his "disciples" (μαθηται) learning the ways and the will of God. Accordingly, becoming a disciple who enjoys the restorative effect of rest and confidently resting in the arms of Jesus recurringly involves one very important "work"—listening intently and obediently to the voice of the Master or the Rabbi. This listening immediately connects the invitation to "rest" as a call to "listen intently" to the words of Jesus, with a firm resolve to obey wholeheartedly.

εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὑρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν"; unless otherwise stated, translations of biblical passages are ours.

[14] See Mariana Albuquerque. "Philippines' Ten Most Searched Bible Verses," *Christianity Today,* January 16, 2024, accessed September 19, 2024, https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/01/philippines-popular-10-bible-verses-john-1-1/.

[15] Matthew (11:28–29) and Mark used the same root term for rest, i.e., Mark 6:31 καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· δεῦτε ὑμεῖς αὐτοὶ κατ' ἰδίαν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε ὀλίγον. ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ ἐρχόμενοι καὶ οἱ ὑπάγοντες πολλοί, καὶ οὐδὲ φαγεῖν εὐκαίρουν.

The Epistle to the Hebrews equally mentions something about collective rest. Interestingly, its reference to "rest" is also connected intricately with the divine "voice." Hence, the negative portrayal in 3:11 that,

> "Therefore, I swore in my anger,
> 'They will never enter into my rest.'"
>
> (ὡς ὤμοσα ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ μου·
> εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου.)

was predicated by the prophylactic warning in vv. 7-8 (and repeated in v.15 and in 4:7)[16]

> Today, if you (plural) hear his (God's) voice,
> do not harden your (plural) hearts as at the rebellion
>
> (Σήμερον ἐὰν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ ἀκούσητε,
> μὴ σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς ἐν τῷ παραπικρασμῷ)

In this context, enjoying (i.e., "entering into") God's rest necessitates listening to and the actualisation of ("obedience to") the assertions, commands, and mandates of the "voice of God" (the "Word" of God).

Although this has not been highlighted in most studies of the passage, it is also observable that what follows this recurring and striking motif of "resting and listening" in chapters 3 and 4 in Hebrews must have been very important for its author. After the sermon on "rest and listening," the author writes in 4:12-13:

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[16] Note, however, that Hebrews 4:7 does not contain the phrase "as at the rebellion" (ὡς ἐν τῷ παραπικρασμῷ). The phrase echoes Psalm 95:11. On the use of the psalm in the Epistle to the Hebrew, see J. Michael McKay Jr., "'If They Will Enter My Rest': The Impact of the Greek Translation Technique of Psalm 95 for the Argument of Hebrews 3 and 4," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44, no. 3 (2022): 390–410, https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X211049173; José Adriano Filho, "Hebrews and the Scriptures: The use of Ps 95:7b-11 and Genesis 2:2b in Hebrews 3–4," *Reflexus: Revista Semestral de Teologia e Ciências das Religiões* 12, no. 19 (2018): 299–315, https://doi.org/10.20890/reflexus.v12i19.558; Peter E Enns, "Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1–4:13," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 255–80.

> "[12]Indeed, *the word of God is living and active*. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to the point where it divides soul and spirit, joints, and marrow; it judges the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.[13] Nothing in creation is hidden from his sight. Everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we must all render an account."[17]
>
> Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργὴς καὶ τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον καὶ διϊκνούμενος ἄχρι μερισμοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος, ἁρμῶν τε καὶ μυελῶν, καὶ κριτικὸς ἐνθυμήσεων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας· καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις ἀφανὴς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, πάντα δὲ γυμνὰ καὶ τετραχηλισμένα τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ, πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος.

In this context, the earlier mention of "resting and listening" becomes a hermeneutical signpost for understanding what the author meant when he asserted "the word of God is living and active" (Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργὴς). As such, it becomes clearer that experiencing the power and life-giving benefits of God's Word necessitates resting and that rest can only materialise as the community listens to his voice and heeds what it says.

The people Moses led out of Egypt did not enter "God's rest" because even though they heard God's voice, they refused to heed it (Heb 3:19; 4:6, 11). Nevertheless, the good news is that the invitation to this communal rest continues. With a warning, the author would assert in 4:1:

> "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it."
>
> Φοβηθῶμεν οὖν, μήποτε καταλειπομένης ἐπαγγελίας εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ δοκῇ τις ἐξ ὑμῶν ὑστερηκέναι.

The author would then reassert in 4:11:

> "Therefore, let us make every effort to enter into that rest, so that no one may fall by following that example of refusing to believe."
>
> σπουδάσωμεν οὖν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς ἐκείνην τὴν κατάπαυσιν, ἵνα μὴ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τις ὑποδείγματι πέσῃ τῆς ἀπειθείας.

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[17] *New Catholic Bible*, emphasis added.

It is noteworthy that the writer of Hebrews mentions that the theological basis for enjoying rest was because "God rested on the seventh day from all his works" (Heb 4:4). Clearly, the intertextual resonance of the Sabbath rest in the Old Testament is in view here.

Accordingly, one of the stipulations of the Decalogue (Exo 20:8, 10) declares:

> *"Remember to keep the day of Sabbath holy!"*
> (אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ זָכוֹר)

and in the observance of Sabbath, the Israelites were mandated,

> "… you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter"
> (לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה | וּבִנְךָ־וּבִתֶּךָ).

However, the scope of this prohibitive command was not limited to the Israelites, but extended to the different groups within their cohort,

> "your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements" (וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ עַבְדְּךָ).

In short, even at the time of its institutionalisation, it is the whole community that was mandated to observe the special meaning of "rest."

The instruction to keep the day of Sabbath holy (that is, "dedicated") is reminiscent of God's own initiative to enjoy the benefits of resting from his creative tasks (Genesis 1:3-2:4a)—enjoying the "very good-ness" (טוֹב מְאֹד [Genesis 1:31[18]]) of his creation, which came into being through his effectual "word" ("And God said, 'Let there be… and there was'" ([וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי וַיְהִי]).

In this creation context, the voice of the Lord was at its clearest and most potent, materialising what it proclaims, and resulting eventually in the resting of the hard-working Divine. However, in the Genesis context, God rested not because he needed to rest out of

[18] Gen 1:31: יַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד ("And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good…").

necessity, or out of physical exhaustion, or the lack of strength and energy. God rested because he witnessed the "ultimate perfection" of his own creation (טוֹב מְאֹד)!

What this context teaches is this: In his resting, God's creation also rested. It was not simply a passive cessation of God's activity, but a deliberate celebration of the "very good-ness" (טוֹב מְאֹד)) of what God had created. Yet God was not alone in this stupendous celebration. It was a "commune-nity" of the Creator and the created order, that is, the Almighty God, his creation, and his creatures. The communality was reciprocal, but the end is god-ward: rest leads to worship and adoration. This worship reminds us of the declaration of the Psalmist, "The heavens declare the glory of the Lord, and the sky proclaims his handiwork" (19:1).[19]

In the Exodus context, the "resting" (נוח)[20] of God and the voice of God are inseparably connected. God is the benefactor of rest, while the Israelites (and everyone with them) were its beneficiaries. It was not just a legal stipulation. Whilst its proclamation bears all the features of a legal narrative, the rationale for such a command was more than a superficial legal gobbledegook. It was meant deliberately for the benefit of the whole created community.

At a time when the Church is calling for synodality, we, the faithful, ought to listen more intently with undivided resolve to obey what God is saying to us and the humility to unconditionally embrace the "others" outside the comforts of our "self." The call for synodality is a clarion call to solidarity and communality of "rest". As the author of Hebrews exhorted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"!

"*Minte-Er Tako!*": Concluding Reflection

Our Sadanga experience of ***their*** *Te-Er* became an affirmation of our own journey to go ahead with the Cornerstone-Oral Bible

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[19] Ps 19:1: הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מַגִּיד הָרָקִיעַ.

[20] In Genesis 2:2, the writer used וַיִּשְׁבֹּת for "he (God) rested" instead of וַיָּנַח.

Translation program in Asia-Pacific and allow the Word of God to be spoken ("proclaimed") in the mother tongue to understand the Good News that is innate among the people like the *Te-Er*. Indeed, the Word of God is for all.... "*para sa tanan*"—"*Minte-er tako, Kakailyan!*" "Let us rest, *mga kababayan!*"

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Landas 37:1 (2025) 137–142

HOMILY: THE FEAST OF ST. MATTHEW AND CBAP'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

EPH 4:1–7.11–13; MT 9:9–13

21 SEPTEMBER 2024

Most Rev. Broderick S. Pabillo, D.D.

How time flies! The Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP) is already 25 years old! Happy Anniversary to all of us! It feels like just yesterday when a small group of biblical scholars and teachers came together to establish CBAP in 1999. I well remember that year when Fr. James Swetnam, God rest his soul, came over to the country to help us start CBAP. That year was also meaningful for me, for it was the year that I left formal teaching in the academe and started my life as a parish priest in laid-back St. Ezekiel Moreno Parish in Macarascas, Palawan. Since that year, I left formation work in the seminary. I was able to teach some courses in the Bible time and again after that year, but no longer as a full-time teacher. I was able to give some courses in San Jose Seminary in Puerto Princesa, in San Carlos Seminary, and in Don Bosco School of Theology before I came as bishop in Taytay, Palawan, in the year 2021.

A lot has changed in 25 years. Now the membership of the CBAP has grown. Some of the old guards have gone to the Father of us All, and many young people, most of whom I no longer personally know, have enlivened the group. CBAP has indeed changed and grown these 25 years!

Thank you for inviting me to be part of this silver anniversary, especially for asking me to preside at this mass. It is providential that today is the feast of St. Matthew, an apostle and an evangelist. As an apostle, he reminds us of our call to follow the Lord. The succinct call of Jesus to Matthew, "Follow me!" is addressed to all of us. Our various engagements in the service of the Word of God—as professors, as writers, as scholars and researchers, as Bible animators, as translators, and what not—these are all different expressions of our effort to live in a manner worthy of the call we have each received to follow the Lord Jesus. I believe that I will not be far from the truth in affirming that each of us tries to be faithful to the Word of God and to spread the Word in various ways, through our teaching, through print media, through electronic media, and our preaching. These are the engagements of an apostle and an evangelist: to be faithful to the Word and to spread the Good News. Because of this fidelity and this going out to preach, the message goes out through all the earth. We continue the mission to let the message of the good news reach all the earth.

"Reach all the earth"—this is a tall order. In the year 2033, nine years from now, we will be celebrating the 2,000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the great missionary mandate of preaching to the ends of the earth. But after 2000 years, only around two billion of the eight billion inhabitants of the earth have accepted Christ, and that in various levels—some deeply, but many superficially. I wonder how many of the more than six billion non-Christians have at least heard of Jesus Christ, have heard the message that God loves them so much that he sent his only Son to die for them so that they may have the fullness of life.

Our theme for this anniversary celebration is: "'SPEAK, LORD!' (1 Sam 3:9): 25 Years of Listening and Responding to God's Word for a World in Crisis." We believe that God continues to speak to the world even in this world of crisis that we are in. He is not absent from our problems. He has something to say in our crisis. We are grateful to believe in this. At the same time, we feel the weight of the responsibility of listening and responding to His Word, and resounding it to our world. How to do this?

When I started my ministry outside of the seminary and academic setting 25 years ago, I was so eager to spread the knowledge of the Bible, and I still am. But back then, I tried to do the ministry as I had known it then. I organized Bible studies among the fisherfolk and the farmers in Macarascas in Palawan. They did not have any Bible. I got them Bibles. I asked them to read—they could hardly read; the prints in our standard Bibles are too small for them. More than the prints, they could hardly read, literally. Probably none of them had read a book in their life, not even a comic book. There is none in our area. They could not read, so I talked and conversed with them. I found that they do not have any sense of history or geography. There is no significance for them of what 2000 years or 300 years ago means. They do not know where Canaan is, much less Babylon or Assyria. They are blank about salvation history. Their concerns and knowledge are only in the here and now. So they cannot connect with the literary-historical criticism, the matter that we mostly teach in the seminary. Hence, a new approach has to be done to present the Bible and its truths to them.

Trying, observing, and getting feedback from them, I realize the value of the sayings and parables of Jesus. They can easily relate that healthy people do not need a doctor, while sick people do. They can relate to the story of Jesus about the call of Matthew. They can relate that, being a tax collector, Matthew can be taken as a corrupt person and even a traitor because he was working for a foreign power. They know what corruption is. They experience this even among their barangay officials. They understand what a *makapili* is. I am sorry that I have realized these things only after my stint of teaching in the seminary. I wonder if my students also realized this now that they are engaged in the preaching of the Word in their ministries. I hope they do not preach what I had taught them in class about exegesis. Yes, we still need to do exegesis; this is an exercise that we do to know the text and its meaning well, but we do not do exegesis for the people. Only a few are capable of doing this. However, we impart to them the result of our exegesis. We who have the facility; we masticate the Word and then give the people spiritual food that they can digest and apply in their lives. I do not know if my experience over these 25 years is in line with your own experiences in making the Word of God alive among

our ordinary Catholics. Let us be forewarned. I have heard it said that exegetes are boring preachers if we preach as we teach exegesis. The challenge is how to preach the freshness of the Word in a way that people can understand and live.

Do we need to change gear? While we have to make the effort to make the Bible relevant to the two billion Christians—and this in itself is already a tall order knowing how ignorant our people are about the faith and the Bible, should we not set our eyes and our efforts to reach out to the other six billion non-Christians out there, if we have to preach the Good News to all peoples? We can hope to have greater and faster reach if we seriously engage in digital evangelization. There is a vast digital continent out there that we need to reach.

Allow me to share with you some of my small experiences. Although situated in far-away Taytay, I can reach thousands through the daily episodes of FIRST THINGS FIRST that are put on social media. It is a short explanation of the first readings of the daily liturgy in Tagalog. I am honestly surprised that Filipinos access it even in Dubai, Australia, and other parts of the world. I hope I can reach some soul out there looking for some good news to hang on to.

Another experience: Because of the geographical situation of our apostolic vicariate, our priests can reach only a small portion of their flock on Sundays. There are very limited means of transportation in our parishes for people to come to church, and the chapels are far from each other or are even situated in other islands. The priests can reach only three or four chapels each Sunday. We have more than 500 chapels and they are served by only 42 priests. So, most of our faithful are served by our lay ministers in their respective chapels. These lay ministers lead in the liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion. But how can we expect them to share the Word of God every Sunday in a meaningful and correct way? Many of them have barely finished high school! To remedy the situation a bit, I write the homilies that they can read every Sunday. I post these on my Facebook page and the Facebook page of the vicariate, and they share them in their chat groups. I simply ask them to read these homilies well and meaningfully.

I make it a point that these reflections are simple and relevant. I hope that in this way the people in our far-flung areas can be fed with God's Word regularly and they can profit from it.

So far, these are some of my efforts to reach many more people than I can physically minister to. I am sure you also have your own experiences in responding to the mandate to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ. I am interested to know them and be inspired by them. We continue the work of St. Matthew, an apostle and an evangelist, to make Jesus known and loved.

St. Matthew, inspire us, guide us, and pray for us. Amen.

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Broderick Soncuaco Pabillo, D.D. was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Manila by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006 and became Vicar Apostolic of Taytay, Palawan, in 2021 under Pope Francis. He earned his licentiate in Sacred Scriptures from the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1986. Pabillo previously worked at the Don Bosco Center of Studies and served as rector of Don Bosco Seminary. He also taught in various seminaries across the Philippines. A respected biblical scholar, his book, *The Bible: 100% Divine, 100% Human*, is a popular introduction to the Scriptures. Before becoming a bishop, he was the parish priest of St. Ezekiel Moreno Parish in Puerto Princesa. Over the years, Pabillo has held several leadership roles within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). He also served as Chair of the Office of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences from 2017 to 2019 and was elected President of the Philippine Bible Society for two terms, from 2012 to 2014 and again from 2020 to 2021.

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HOMILY: UNLEARNING AND LEARNING
25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
MARK 9:30–37
22 SEPTEMBER 2024

Most Rev. Pablo Virgilio S. David, D.D.

I have a brother who is an artist, a good painter. He gives free art lessons to children. But when it's adults who ask to follow his lessons, he charges a fee. I asked him, Why? His answer to me was, "Because they have a lot of things to unlearn before they can learn again." He said teaching adults tends to be more stressful; it takes a lot more effort. He prefers to teach children because, according to him, kids are already natural artists. There is something refreshing about the way they look at the world; it's like they're seeing it for the first time. They are still full of awe and wonder, he says.

My brother also explained that, as people grow older, they tend to pick up some habits that spoil their natural artistry. For example, the moment they learn to use a ruler or a compass, they begin to lose their confidence about drawing straight lines or circles with a free hand. They will start using a ruler to feel more confident about the straightness of their lines or roundness of their circles, whether they're drawing a house or a landscape. They do not realize that imperfect lines and circles are more artful than perfect ones.

Even worse is when they see the works of good artists and begin to feel so inferior to them. They say Van Gogh was not so popular

in his lifetime because he lived at a time when artists competed with each other in realism. They were expected to paint things as close to reality as possible, complete with all the details. Until, of course, photography made their works almost irrelevant. Van Gogh dared to paint things not as they were but as they appeared to him. He expressed his impressions of people, places, and scenes like a little child and established impressionism as a genre of modern art.

You see, not everything that we learn is right. For art, spontaneity is a big factor. When people are pressured to follow certain standards, they are prevented from expressing themselves and interpreting the world through their art. They begin to lose their imagination and replace it with abstract ideas, concepts, and theories. At LST, I once taught an elective biblical course entitled "Reading Between the Lines of the Scriptures," subtitled "The Role of Imagination in Biblical Interpretation." I worry for our theological students whose imaginations are stifled by their theological formation. They are the ones who would be easily lured by fundamentalism. It was the seminal work of James Barr on this topic that made me understand that Fundamentalism is not a hermeneutical issue, but a mental health issue. Having lost imagination, a fundamentalist can no longer even distinguish between the literal and the literary.

Our Gospel points out two obstacles to learning. They have to do with the things or attitudes that we need to unlearn before we can dispose ourselves to learn. The word disposition seems to be fundamental to discipleship; are we disposed or indisposed to learning? (The French have invested an overload of meaning in the word *disponible, disponibilité.*) I said two things to unlearn: the first is pretentiousness; the second is competitiveness. They are two of the most serious blocks to learning, which Jesus is addressing in today's Gospel.

Mark tells us that after Jesus explained to his disciples the objective of their journey to Jerusalem, "They did not understand what he meant, but they were afraid to ask questions." It's easier to teach people who feel free to ask questions when they do not know than those who

would rather be quiet and pretend to know when they do not know. When I was in college, the Campus Crusaders for Christ popularized the slogan: "Christ is the answer!" We reacted and said, "What was the question?" When we would rather offer ready-made answers than confront the questions asked by the present generation, our faith will regress into the dustbin of irrelevance.

It is understandable, however, why some people would rather shut up because they are afraid to make mistakes, or ashamed to admit their ignorance. That is what happens to those who have been traumatized in their childhood, bullied, ridiculed, or humiliated for asking questions. The learning process requires a lot of humility, the humility to admit that we need help, that there is so much that we do not know, and we do not stop wanting to know.

"Less talk, less mistakes" is the most common reasoning of people who put a premium on making a good impression or gaining people's approval rather than on the act of learning itself. That brings us to the other challenge to discipleship: overcoming the hazard of self-comparison. Unlearning competitiveness.

Mark also tells us Jesus asked his disciples what it was they were arguing about along the way. Earlier, no one would ask a question. Now no one would answer his question. The real reason why they just kept quiet, Mark explains, is because they were actually debating about who among them was the greatest. That's another thing many adults need to unlearn—competitiveness. You would remember what that precious book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said the Little Prince found ridiculous in the behavior of grown-ups: their preoccupation with what he calls "Matters of Consequence." When people no longer have time to sit down and watch the sunset with a friend, or pay attention to a rose, or befriend a fox, that's when they begin to run around like headless chickens in business suits or even clerical garbs.

They say most schools tend to reinforce an unhealthy spirit of competition among students through their systems of grading and honors, rewards, recognitions, merits, and demerits. It's a good thing that many schools are now introducing a different kind of grading

system that does not rate students against each other but only in relation to themselves or their own earlier performances. Many students lose their self-confidence the moment they are compared or rated against their classmates.

I find it interesting how Jesus addressed the power struggle among his disciples through a symbolic prophetic action. "He took a child, placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it said, 'Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives the one who sent me.'" (Mk 9:36) Touché, as they'd say in French.

We are about to enter the second session of the Synod on Synodality. People foresee that the atmosphere is going to be tense in the Synod hall because of the polarities that prevail especially in the local Churches in the Global North. But I am confident that Jesus is doing exactly what he did in today's Gospel, he has also put a child in our midst and his name is Pope Francis.


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