LOYOLA PAPERS

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SPECIAL ISSUE:
60th Anniversary of LST and LHS



ARTICLES

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From the Preface of the 2025 LST Statutes

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

We are living in times of transition, both in the wider Church and here at the Loyola School of Theology. Earlier this year, we witnessed the election of Pope Leo XIV following the passing of our beloved Pope Francis. At LST, we celebrated the solemn investiture of our 11th President, Rev. Fr. Renato Repole, SJ, a distinguished biblical scholar and seasoned seminary formator. Times like these are often marked by a mix of emotions—anxiety, apprehension, and anguish, yes, but also promise, possibility, and potential.

A similar atmosphere of transition surrounded the establishment of LST together with Loyola House of Studies in 1965. By year's end, the Philippines would see a shift in leadership from President Diosdado Macapagal to Ferdinand Marcos, whose presidency would extend for over two decades. At the same time, the Second Vatican Council would conclude with its final public session on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Within the Society of Jesus, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ had just been elected Superior General and would guide the Jesuits through a demanding but vital *aggiornamento* of their identity and mission.

It was amid these quiet yet momentous developments that the Loyola House of Studies School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies (LHS STES) was formally inaugurated on 12 September 1965, Feast of the Holy Name of Mary, by His Eminence Rufino Cardinal Santos, D.D., Archbishop of Manila. In the chapel, we already glimpse signs of renewal: a freestanding altar and a prominent ambo from the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. Among the founding faculty stood the first dean, later to be the first president of LST, Fr. Catalino G. Arevalo, SJ,

leading a pioneering team of Filipino and foreign professors. One can only imagine the excitement in those classrooms, where theological giants taught against the backdrop of fresh debates, incisive questions, and daring insights from the recent Council.

And the rest is history, we could have said. But not quite, because LST is actually still very young and a lot remains to be done despite the remarkable growth that it has gone through for the past sixty years. In his inaugural address, Fr. Repole expressed gratitude for the institution's milestones over its 60 years as a theological school and 25 years as an ecclesiastical faculty, noting its growing international reach, strengthened faculty, improved facilities, and recognition in global rankings.

Looking ahead, among the major concerns that he highlighted are the need to form students who can theologize in context with critical thinking and discernment, to address the ethical and human implications of artificial intelligence and digital culture, and to ensure that theology remains pastoral and missionary, speaking to the realities of the poor and marginalized. He further stressed the importance of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, stronger networking and collaboration with institutions locally and globally, commitment to integral ecology, concretizing the calls of the Synod on Synodality for reform and participation, and implementing robust safeguarding protocols for community well-being. These are but some of the items in his important list that call for our collaboration and contribution.

In this present issue of *Loyola Papers*, we are one in celebrating the **Life, Leadership, and Legacy** that have formed and nurtured our cherished School of Theology into what it has become today. In line with this, we are happy to reproduce as part of our documentation the brief historical note titled,

The First Sixty Years of Loyola School of Theology excerpted from our recently approved Statutes, as well as a modest selection of pictures that would take us back in time as we revisit our roots. We have also received kind permission to include the full text of Fr. Repole's address to the LST community on his inauguration. By publishing them here, we hope not only to help preserve these important texts for posterity's sake but also to provide you with convenient access to these resources, which can continue to nourish and inspire our reflection and discernment.

* * *

First, among this issue's featured articles, we have **Lorenzo Zura**'s *In Praise of Limits: A Reading of the Creation Accounts,* which presents a striking theological reappraisal of Genesis by framing limits not as deficiencies but as the very conditions that make life, freedom, and relationship possible. The essay's unique proposal lies in its portrayal of God as one who exercises "meek omnipotence:" a power revealed not in domination or violence, but in self-restraint, separation, and the creation of space for the other—especially through Shabbat and the mystical notion of *tzimtzum*. Zura shows how boundaries, whether in the ordering of chaos, the law, or human desire, are protective and life-giving, safeguarding relational harmony against the destructive impulse of totalizing will. His reinterpretation of the "fall" as humanity's mistrust of God's gift of limits, rather than a mere act of disobedience, likewise offers a fresh lens on original sin and salvation history. The work's most valuable contribution is its ethical and ecological resonance: by embracing limits as divine gifts, humanity is called to exercise stewardship and relationality modeled on God's own meekness, an urgently relevant vision in today's culture of limitless consumption and power.

The next paper by **Jieqi Huang** titled, *Glimpses of Joy in the Beginning of the Lucan Gospel: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Lk 1:5-2:52*, offers an enlightening reading of the passage that highlights how the theme of joy is interwoven into the very beginning of Luke's Gospel. Its distinctive contribution lies in showing how joy is not only personal, as experienced by Zechariah and Elizabeth in the birth of John, but also communal and eschatological, signaling the dawn of God's saving action for Israel. By analyzing the story's chiastic structure, rhetorical allusions to Old Testament traditions, and use of literary techniques like intertextuality, Huang demonstrates how Luke frames joy as rooted in God's fidelity to his covenant and as a bridge between promise and fulfillment. The study also insightfully contrasts Zechariah's doubt and Elizabeth's praise, revealing how human weakness may delay but never thwart God's initiative. Overall, Huang's profoundly insightful portrayal of joy as both gift and summons brings to the fore the gracious character of the divine initiative that transforms individual suffering into praise, while also inviting the wider community to participate in God's ongoing work in history.

Vincent Ray Daut's *Paraconsistent Logic and the Metaphysics of the Incarnation: A Defense of Jc Beall's Contradictory Christology* explores Jc Beall's controversial claim that the Chalcedonian formula—that Christ is both fully divine and fully human—entails a genuine contradiction. However, instead of seeing this as a flaw based on classical Aristotelian logic, Beall opens a way forward through paraconsistent logic, specifically First-Degree Entailment (FDE), which allows contradictions without collapsing into incoherence. Daut breaks down this "Contradictory Christology" by highlighting its seven virtues, namely: its simplicity, refusal to manipulate theological terms, metaphysical neutrality, preservation of Christ as the principal subject, balanced treatment of divinity and humanity, respect

for the mystery of the hypostatic union, and emphasis on faith. Daut's discussion shows how Beall reframes the role of logic in theology: instead of forcing doctrine into classical categories, theology should preserve the revealed paradox as it stands. The paper's most significant insight is that doctrinal fidelity sometimes requires accepting contradiction rather than resolving it, positioning faith not in spite of contradiction but precisely through it. Its unique contribution lies in demonstrating how logic can safeguard rather than threaten the integrity of the Incarnation, offering a bold and controversial alternative to centuries of harmonizing attempts that often risked distorting Christ's identity.

Meanwhile, **Nguyen Van Hoa**'s *John Paul II and Obedience as Dialogue* explores the theological and spiritual significance of the vow of obedience in religious life through the teachings of St. John Paul II. In this paper, the author highlights John Paul II's Christ-centered, Trinitarian, ecclesial, and pneumatological understanding of obedience, positively appreciated as a free, filial, and loving act modeled on Christ's surrender to the Father, lived out within the Church, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. John Paul II frames obedience as dialogue—rooted in listening, discernment, and mutual trust—rather than authoritarian command, showing that it fosters true freedom and communion. The paper's unique contribution is its integration of John Paul II's theology with concrete religious practice, presenting obedience not as a form of coercion or constraint but as a liberating path of love, trust, and mission. Its most important insight lies in reframing obedience as a conscious, relational, and Spirit-led response to God's will, which preserves personal dignity while deepening communal fidelity. In doing so, it offers a fresh vision of obedience as both a witness of faith and a source of renewal for consecrated life today.

Kerr Nell S. Deliva's article, *The Mandate for Accountability and the Rule of Law: A Theological-Ethical Analysis of the House of Representatives' Role after 'Duterte v. House of Representatives*,' offers a profound reflection on the constitutional crisis surrounding the impeachment proceedings against the incumbent Vice President. Its unique contribution lies in framing the Supreme Court's invalidation of the Articles of Impeachment not simply as a legal setback but as a theological "kairos," a revelatory moment that exposes the moral vocation of the nation's democratic institutions. Drawing on Catholic Social Teaching, particularly *Centesimus Annus*, Deliva underscores that the House's mandate for accountability and the Court's insistence on due process are not contradictory but complementary paths toward the common good. The article insightfully highlights the ethical principle that "the end does not justify the means," warning that justice pursued outside the bounds of law undermines both public trust (*fides publica*) and democratic stability. By proposing prudence, fidelity to due process, and a redefined prophetic witness as guiding virtues for the legislature, Deliva charts a way forward where accountability can be zealously pursued without eroding the rule of law. This integration of theology, ethics, and law makes the work a distinctive and timely contribution to discussions on democratic governance and moral responsibility in the Philippines.

Finally, in *What About a Theology of the Mind? Faith Response to the Mental Health Crisis,* **Ramil Marcos** and **Phil Nielsen Galvez** argue for the urgent development of a "theology of the mind" as a pastoral and theological response to the growing mental health crisis in the Philippines. Their timely study highlights the systemic problems surrounding this important concern, such as limited access to professional help, cultural stigma, poverty, and inadequate government facilities. The paper draws from Scripture, Church teaching, papal pronouncements, and

local initiatives to show that mental health struggles are not alien to Christian life but resonate deeply with biblical figures, the life of Christ, and the Church's mission of compassion. Among its unique contributions is the proposal to integrate faith, psychology, and pastoral practice into a "theology of the mind" that moves beyond tolerating or spiritualizing mental illness toward genuine accompaniment, advocacy, and holistic healing, with a view of mental health as an integral aspect of human dignity. Framing it not only as a social or medical issue but as a theological and ecclesial imperative, among its important recommendations is for the Church to reclaim its role, not merely as a place of prayer, but as a proactive community of compassion, advocacy, and support.

* * *

Fr. Repole concluded his address by envisioning LST as a theological school rooted in service to God and the Church, a laboratory of discernment at the frontiers of theology and society, a hub of collaboration, and a formative community sending forth ministers who are spiritually grounded, doctrinally sound, pastorally effective, and capable of reading the signs of the times. He said:

> These are bold aspirations, but much of this is already happening... Still, we aim for more — walking together, relying on God's help, and using our human, material, and spiritual resources. We journey together in hope, with St. Paul's words from *Philippians* to reassure us (4:13): "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Yes, we can do all things in Him who strengthens us.

Enfolded as we all still are by the joy of this Jubilee Year 2025, let us heed this summons to "journey together in hope" as one LST community, entrusting to the Lord our plans and labors, our strengths and limitations, our fears and aspirations for the decades still to come. May the next chapter in our

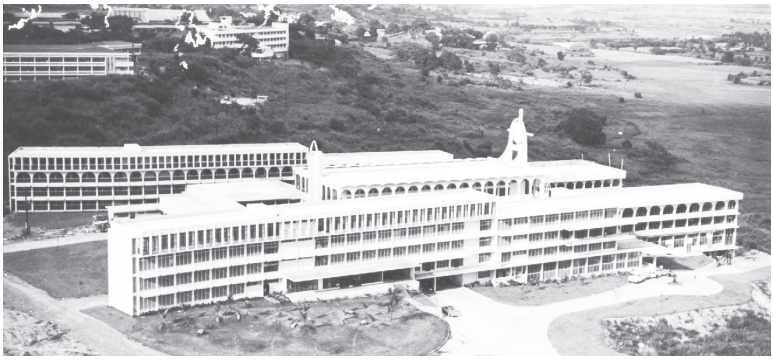
history be marked by fidelity to our mission, openness to the Spirit, and generosity in service, so that everything that we do may redound to the greater glory of God and the life of His Church, especially here in Asia.

Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo

ARTICLES

The First Sixty Years of Loyola School of Theology

From the Preface of the 2025 LST Statutes[1]



Loyola School of Theology was inaugurated in 1965 to provide theological formation for the scholastics of the Society of Jesus, the seminarians of San Jose Seminary, and the scholastics of a number of other religious orders. It is the result of a fusion, first proposed by the Jesuit Provincial Fr. Francis X. Clark, of the faculties of Berchmans College in Cebu City (the former Jesuit Scholasticate) and San Jose Seminary in Highway 54, Quezon City.

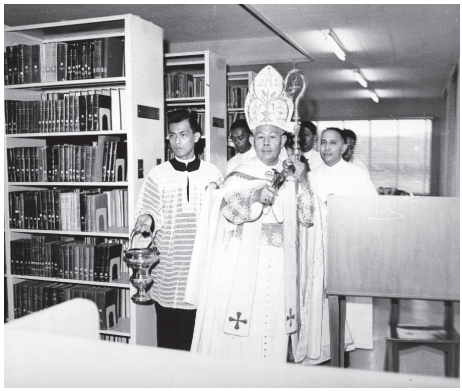
San Jose Seminary itself traces its origin to the Colegio de San Jose, founded on 25 August 1601. On 08 August 1621, Pope Gregory XV issued a brief authorizing the Archbishop of Manila to confer degrees, including degrees in theology, on

1. This article is taken from the Preface of the 2025 Statutes of Loyola School of Theology. The work of Fr. Victor R. Salanga S.J. entitled "The History of the Relationship Between Loyola School of Theology and Ateneo de Manila University" (2006) served as a secondary source integrated into the main account.



the candidates presented to him by the Rector of the Jesuit College of Manila, in which the students of the Colegio de San Jose attended lectures. After the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from the Philippines in 1768 and the extinction of the Jesuit University of San Ignacio, the Colegio de San Jose continued as a separate institution under the administration of the secular clergy until it was incorporated into the University of Santo Tomas by the Spanish government in 1875 as a school of medicine and pharmacy. By a brief of Pope St. Pius X to the Most Reverend Ambrose Agius, then Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, dated 03 May 1910, the Colegio de San Jose was restored to the administration of the Society of Jesus for the explicit purpose of the education of priests. Its existence as an interdiocesan seminary for the entire Philippines was recognized again by Decree no. 645 of the First Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1953.

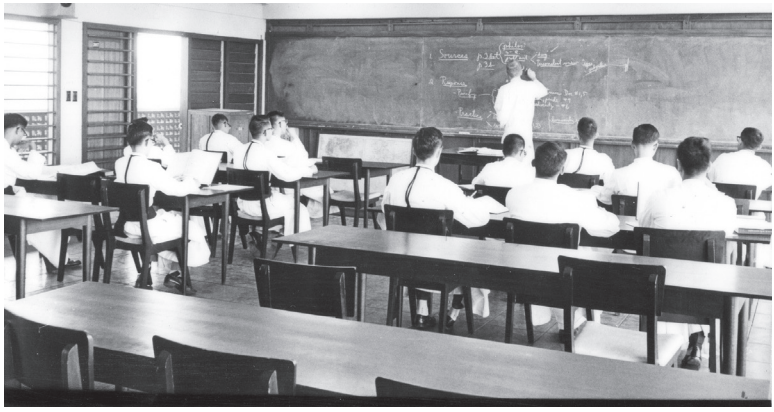
On 12 July 1965, the Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines, Fr. Horacio de la Costa S.J., with the authorization of the Jesuit Superior General Fr. Pedro Arrupe S.J., opened the present School as an institute of philosophy and theology incorporating within it the Faculty of ecclesiastical studies



of San Jose Seminary. After one academic quarter at San Jose, the School moved to the present site on the campus of the Ateneo de Manila University and was called the Loyola House of Studies School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies (LHS STES). On 12 September 1965, the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary, the LHS STES was formally inaugurated by His Eminence Rufino Cardinal Santos, D.D., then Archbishop of Manila, just as the Second Vatican Council was drawing to a close in Rome. The first classes at the new site were held on 18 September 1965.

For a whole year before the opening of STES, there were meetings to discuss the new house of studies, and one of the questions discussed was the relationship of the House of Studies to the Ateneo de Manila University. Ever since the opening of the school, the nature of this relationship has come up time and again in many faculty meetings.

Various proposals have been offered regarding the nature of the relationship. Early in the deliberations of the Committee on the House of Studies, Fr. Francis X. Clark, then Provincial, suggested that the House of Studies should be "a corporate college within the University". Nothing definite was decided. The reason is perhaps best seen in the Minutes of the LHS Faculty Meeting of March 7, 1967, where a majority of the faculty expressed themselves "in favor of a fairly loose relationship between STES and the University. Most felt that no contract should be drawn up at present, but that we be allowed



to operate as we have this past year, experimenting and testing various approaches." Hence, for the school year 1967-68, it operated as a federated institute of the University.

Yet even then, there was a proposal from the University administrators that there should be one University-wide Department of Theology, with the LHS *Praeses* (Director) as an ex officio overall chairman of theology and holding ultimate responsibility for the theology program[2]. This last proposal was accepted in the LHS Faculty Meeting of February 6, 1968, and later confirmed by Father Provincial Horacio de la Costa.

Meanwhile, on 01 January 1968, the *Normae Generales de Studiis*, the new statutes for studies in the Jesuit Order, became effective; and on 16 January the Jesuit Provincial constituted the School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies as an institute separate and independent in administration and finances from the Jesuit Community of Loyola House of Studies, under its own President, responsible directly to the Provincial.

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2. This can be seen from the proposal submitted by Fr. John F. Doherty S.J., Academic Vice-President of the Ateneo de Manila University, on 12 December 1967 to Fr. Joseph Galdon S.J., Assistant Dean of the Ateneo College of Arts and Sciences, for discussion among the University Administrators.

Apparently the proposal to establish a University-wide Department of Theology with the LHS STES *Praeses* (Director) leading the Department never got off the ground because in 11 July 1969, Fr. de la Costa still writes about it as a goal to be accomplished: "I take it that the direction in which we wish to move is for the Loyola House of Studies to be in the truest sense the Divinity School of the Ateneo de Manila, with full charge of and responsibility for the graduate and undergraduate theology programs; and that the financial agreement now reached is a step in this direction.... Every effort should be made to move expeditiously in the same direction."

And so the representatives of the Ateneo, the LHS Jesuit Community, and STES met on May 25, 1971 at the STES Conference Room to review and revise the existing relationships between the three entities concerned for a more effective and fruitful collaboration between them. The representatives formally agreed, among other things, that LHS STES, "an affiliate unit of the AdMU, serves the University by helping staff the Theology Department of the School of Arts and Sciences" and that "STES offers an MA/PhD program in the Science of Theology...a degree obtained through the School of Arts and Sciences, Ateneo de Manila University." The Memorandum of Agreement was signed by Fr. Francisco Araneta S.J., Rector and President of the Ateneo de Manila, Fr. Ruben Tanseco S.J., Rector of LHS, and Fr. Pedro Sevilla S.J., Director of STES.

A first draft of the Statutes of STES was proposed for discussion on 07 December 1971. On March 28, 1972, the present name, Loyola School of Theology, was adopted for STES. In February 1977, the Jesuit Provincial and Superior General approved the Statutes that govern LST for a trial period. A semi-final revision was completed on 14 July 1983. In view of the School's affiliation with the Theological Faculty of Fujen

Catholic University, Taipei, for the purpose of granting the ecclesiastical degree Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology to LST graduates, the Statutes were partially revised again according to the pertinent sections of the Apostolic Constitution of Pope John Paul II, *Sapientia christiana*. This revision was completed on 02 August 1984. On 09 October 1985, the Congregation for Catholic Education granted the School affiliation with Fujen Catholic University for a period of five years.

Another revision of the Loyola School of Theology Statutes was completed on 24 February 1988, and on 18 March 1989, the Congregation for Catholic Education constituted and declared the School aggregated to the Jesuit Faculty of Theology at Fujen Catholic University for a period of five years for the purpose of granting the Licentiate and Doctorate degrees in Theology (STL and STD). At the end of three years, a slightly revised edition of the Statutes was sent to the Congregation and was approved conditionally on 07 April 1992 for a period of two years. The Statutes with the suggested changes were forwarded to the Congregation in January 1993, and the Faculty at Fujen gave their approval in February 1993.

After reports on the School in October 1993 by the Dean of the Fujen Faculty of Theology and then by Loyola School of Theology itself, the Congregation expressed willingness to move toward definitive approval of the aggregation pending a final revision of the Statutes. This requested revision of the Statutes was completed on 25 August 1994 and then submitted, through the Fujen Faculty of Theology, to the Congregation for final approval and definitive aggregation. On 01 December 1994, the Congregation approved the Statutes and granted definitive aggregation to the Jesuit Faculty of Theology at Fujen Catholic University for an indeterminate period of time.



In light of the request for the erection of an Ecclesiastical Faculty at Loyola School of Theology, Fr. General and LST Chancellor Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. submitted amendments to the Statutes of the School. These proposed changes are amendments to the Statutes, published in 1995. They were endorsed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines in July 1999, and approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education *ad experimentum* for five years on 13 August 1999[3], thereby instituting Loyola School of Theology as an Ecclesiastical Faculty of Theology.

Meanwhile, the administrative structure of the School of Arts and Sciences of the Ateneo de Manila University became more complex and elaborate as it evolved and branched out into the Loyola Schools, comprised of the School of Humanities, John Gokongwei School of Management, School of Science and Engineering, and School of Social Sciences.

3. The LST Statutes were further revised and approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education of the Holy See in August 2004, October 2014, and October 2020.

As both LST and the Loyola Schools of the Ateneo de Manila University expanded, their relationship has become more and more complicated and has never been definitively defined. The time came to clarify their relationship that was initially agreed upon in the 1971 Memorandum of Agreement. Thus, a new MOA was signed by Fr. Bienvenido F. Nebres S.J., President of Ateneo de Manila University, and Fr. Victor R. Salanga S.J., President of Loyola School of Theology on March 17, 2006, effective from SY 2006-2007 to SY 2011-2012. By virtue of a renewed agreement signed on May 25, 2015, LST, while remaining a federated unit in the University as it had been since 1968, was established as the new Theology and Ministry Program of the School of Humanities.

In the years that followed, LST's mission expanded beyond its home campus through affiliations recognized by the Holy See. On November 9, 2017, the Congregation for Catholic Education, by decree signed by His Eminence Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, D.D., Prefect, approved the affiliation of the Theological Program of St. John Vianney Theological Seminary (SJVTS) in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines with LST. Shortly thereafter, on January 23, 2018, a similar decree signed by the same officials granted the affiliation of St. Joseph Jesuit Scholasticate (SJJS) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. By virtue of this relationship, the Congregation for Catholic Education authorized LST, as an Ecclesiastical Faculty, to confer the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (STB) degree upon SJVTS and SJJS students. These affiliations signaled the growing trust of the Holy See in LST's ability to extend its academic and ecclesial mission beyond its Quezon City campus, fostering theological formation across the Philippines and Asia.

LST AT THE FRONTIERS OF THEOLOGY: MISSION, MILESTONES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS[1]

Renato R. Repole, SJ

Your Excellency, Most Rev. Elias L. Ayuban, Jr., CMF, our bishop here in the Diocese of Cubao, Your Excellencies, Bp. Roberto Gaa of the Diocese of Novaliches, Bp. Jose Rapadas III of the Diocese of Iligan, and Bp. Noel Pedregosa of the Diocese of Malaybalay, Very Rev. Fr. Primitivo Viray, Jr., S.J., President of the Jesuit Conference of Asia-Pacific and my batchmate, Very Rev. Fr. Provincial, Fr. Xavier Olin, S.J., esteemed members of our Board of Trustees, Rev. Fr. Roberto Yap, S.J., President of the Ateneo de Manila University, and his administrative team, Superiors and Directors of Works of our Jesuit communities and institutions, Very Reverend superiors of our students from various congregations, dear benefactors and mission partners, dear faculty and staff of Loyola School of Theology and other institutions, dear alumni, dear members of my family and relatives, beloved former students, dear friends, beloved students of LST, brother Jesuits, good morning!

First of all, I am very happy and grateful for your presence today in this opening Mass of the Holy Spirit and academic convocation. Thank you very much for taking the time to be with the LST community as we begin another academic year. We are grateful to God for the blessings He has bestowed on LST

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1. This article is the inaugural address of Fr. Renato R. Repole, S.J., delivered on 20 August 2025 at the Oratory of St. Ignatius, Loyola House of Studies, Ateneo de Manila University, on the occasion of his investiture as the 11th President of the Loyola School of Theology.

for the past 60 years as a theological school and 25 years as an ecclesiastical faculty. Today, we formally open not just another academic year but, indeed, a formation year, with the Mass of the Holy Spirit, invoking His guidance and grace. Today, I have been installed as the 11th President of this venerable institution. Honestly, I did not expect to be appointed to this mission since, as many of you know, I have been involved in formation work throughout my priestly life—not to mention gardening and raising chickens, on the one hand, and teaching Greek and St. Paul, on the other hand. But, as we all know, God surprises us and challenges us every so often to go into uncharted territories, to stretch our limits, and to make us grow. So, feeling humbled but also honored to have been chosen to carry this task, I accepted it wholeheartedly, relying on the grace of God and on the promise of prayers and support from my superiors and from all of you. This feeling of being supported I already experienced even before I formally took over last May 17, 2025, especially from my predecessor, Fr. Enrico C. Eusebio S.J., who has been patiently walking with me through the labyrinth of administrative and institutional tasks, and even sharing some of my responsibilities. The rest of the staff have also been quite solicitous of my needs and have been very generous in assisting me in my transition into this new role, making sure that I have all the support I need. Thanks to all of you.

Even as the task ahead of me and my team is enormous, I feel fortunate that the legacy I inherit from my predecessors is one that has reached many milestones through its 60 years as a theological school and 25 years as an ecclesiastical faculty. This past year, we celebrated these milestones, even graced by the presence of representatives from the Holy See. We held our annual International Conference on Ignatian Spirituality, Pedagogy, and Leadership together with the Gokongwei Brothers School of Education and Learning Design (GBSEALD)

of the Ateneo de Manila University, which was so well received and attended that most likely it will have a Season 2 this coming year. Moreover, from a small theological school originally intended only for Jesuits and Josefinos and a few other religious congregations, LST has grown much in number, reaching a total of 557 enrollees this semester, including affiliates—the highest so far in LST's history—representing some 45 nations. Another milestone is our sharing in the honor and prestige earned by Ateneo de Manila University in the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World Rankings for Theology, Divinity, and Religious Studies for two years in a row now, placing within the 101–140 bracket in 2024 and in the 101–150 range in 2025, out of more than 1,700 participating universities worldwide, with the Ateneo de Manila being the only Filipino university included in this worldwide ranking. Still another milestone worth mentioning is the growing internationalization of our faculty, thanks to the untiring efforts of past administrations to invite more international faculty, and thanks, too, to the generosity of those who have accepted our invitation, some of whom are already here with us. Moreover, in the area of instruction, ironically, the pandemic allowed LST to upgrade its facilities in order to accommodate the necessity of online courses, which, in the process, expanded our reach, as we now have several hybrid classrooms that can serve especially those who cannot attend face-to-face classes. To improve even more the quality of our program, LST has undergone the preparatory visit of the PAASCU for its Theology and Ministry Program under the School of Humanities of the Ateneo de Manila; and soon, we shall also be visited by AVEPRO, the Vatican's accrediting body for Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities.

Over and above these, LST has continued to honor its Asian Mandate through our Asian Theological Program, that is, the mandate to pay particular attention to our Asian contexts by

offering courses contextualized in both content and method. Hence, for our monthly theological hours, our Student Council and the Administration have tried to identify topics or issues relevant to the Churches in Asia and, indeed, the world at large. To this same end, LST also tries, whenever possible, to offer courses conducted in Asian languages (like Vietnamese, Korean, and Indonesian) to cater to groups from these Asian countries. In addition, LST has greatly expanded its network with other institutions, not just local but also international. Within the campus alone, we collaborate with various institutions like the Ateneo de Manila, which grants our civil degrees for the MA in Theological Studies, PhD in Theology, Doctor of Ministry, and other masteral programs; the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Center for Ignatian Spirituality, Emmaus Center, Catholic Safeguarding Institute, Jesuit Communications, and the Center for Family Ministries. Consequently, LST and these institutes and centers offer a wide array of courses and programs that help develop skills and capacities for mission and ministry. Our latest addition to these programs—and a popular one—is the DIVAS (Diploma in Integral Vocational Accompaniment Towards a Synodal Church). We have also recently launched the Diploma in Integral Leadership and Community Development (DIL) in cooperation with Fondacio-Asia here in the Radio Veritas compound, Quezon City.

Another area worthy of mention is the affiliation with LST of some theologates, both local and international, for the purpose of granting the ecclesiastical degree Baccalaureate in Theology to their graduates: St. John Vianney School of Theology in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, and Saint Joseph Jesuit Scholasticate Theological Institute in Saigon, Vietnam. Then, there are the ongoing applications for affiliation of the St. Vincent School of Theology in Quezon City and the Durando

Institute for Philosophy and Theology of the Vincentians in Dalat, Vietnam. Internationally, LST is a member of the CTI (Collaborative Theological Initiative), the network of the seven English-speaking Jesuit theological centers in the world, for the purpose of helping one another in our parallel mission. Finally, we cannot fail to mention LST's vigorous efforts to promote publication and research from our own faculty and from outside sources, including student outputs—major papers, capstone projects, theses, and dissertations—that are published in our Loyola Papers, Loyola Monographs, and *Landas*.

Having reckoned the many milestones LST has achieved, what else is there for me, for us, to do? If the Lord is coming soon, then probably no more! Seriously, ahead of us is still a big challenge. The previous Strategic Plan of LST is expiring this year (2025), and so we need to craft a new one for the next 5 years, at least. But, as we know, contrary to what others think, this is not only the President's task. So don't expect to hear of my strategic plan here, because we shall do it together, starting with revisiting our existing Vision and Mission, out of which we shall identify probably 4 or 5 Strategic Areas to pursue in the light of our reading of the present and the anticipated future circumstances and needs of the Church and the world, not to mention the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, the Philippine Province Plan, and the directives and orientations from the Vatican document *Veritatis Gaudium* (VG), the Apostolic Constitution governing Ecclesiastical Faculties and universities. Definitely, given the many positive aspects of our theological program, we are determined to continue and develop them as much as we can.

Having said that, I want to highlight some issues or areas of concern that I think we need to consider as we begin to craft our plan.

To begin with, I would like to underline that, as I have said in my interview with *Tinig Loyola*, LST exists not just to teach theology or the content of the Faith but to train students to theologize or do theology in context; not just to memorize dogmas or teachings but to grapple with and make sense of the various issues that confront us believers, using the tools of Faith and Reason, and everything else that helps. An important aspect of this task is to develop our critical thinking, discernment, and communication skills. I hope we can really fulfill this aspiration.

A pressing concern we need to address is the burning issue of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which our present Pope, Leo XIV, describes as "humanity's critical challenge"—a very helpful tool, along with other forms of digital technology, but with serious implications for human dignity, labor justice, and social ethics, not to mention its impact on the quality and integrity of our students' academic projects and outputs. Actually, AI is just one aspect of the whole challenge posed by the technological or digital explosion: there is the grim truth of addiction to gadgets that has taken captive practically all of us, if we are to be honest. And we know what this means in terms of our physical and mental health, and the quality of our relationships, compromising depth and personal encounters.

Equally significant is the reminder of *Veritatis Gaudium* that theological endeavor must not only remain abstract and academic, but also pastoral and missionary, impacting the lives of the poor and marginalized and other societal issues. This implies that theology and theologizing must not only happen and end in the classroom but must speak to and impact the lives of, especially, the disadvantaged. Is our theology and theologizing here at LST already on this level?

Closely related to this is the call of *Veritatis Gaudium* for greater interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in theology—interdisciplinarity understood as disciplines or fields working together but staying distinct, and transdisciplinarity as knowledge and methods being blended into something that transcends the original fields, often including non-academic or practical perspectives. This means, therefore, that we have to invest more in Faculty and Staff Development to better equip ourselves for a more demanding task.

In addition, in the area of organizational capability, *Veritatis Gaudium* strongly encourages ecclesiastical faculties to network or collaborate with other institutions, both local and international. I believe this is one of the strengths of LST, given the growing number of institutions that are now networked with us both within campus and outside, and even internationally, as I have mentioned earlier. Still, there is room for more collaboration among us and other related institutions.

Another global concern that deserves our attention is the promotion of Integral Ecology, which also features in the Ateneo de Manila's strategic plan, in the Philippine Province, in the four Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Furthermore, in the light of the recent Synod on Synodality, one of the most significant legacies of the late Pope Francis, LST needs to see how it can concretize the summons and the invitations contained in the final document, which emphasizes conversion on various levels, structural reforms, women's leadership, enhanced lay participation, accountability, transparency, and healing.

Finally, given the various factors and influences that may endanger the safety and well-being of our community members,

we need to come up with well-thought-out safeguarding protocols to promote a culture of safety and protection, as all other institutions have been mandated to do.

All of these holy desires and aspirations, as I have mentioned, cannot be the work of the President or his team alone. In my Paul class, especially on the theme of the Church, I underline the Apostle's teaching on the Church as a living or organic body with many members, each with distinct functions, all of which must work together for the proper functioning of the body. At the same time, I remind them of the charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit with which each member of the Church is endowed—gifts that are not to be hidden under the bed or bushel basket, as our Lord reminds us, but to be discovered, cultivated, and used for the building up of the Church. Often, a person is endowed not only with a single gift, but with a few, even many, gifts. Imagine, therefore, what a community can become if everyone contributes or shares the gifts they have! St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:19: "Do not quench or extinguish the Spirit" (*to pneuma mē sbennute*). Yes, it is possible to extinguish the Spirit, to prevent it from inflaming us to love and service. But that is not what a disciple of Christ is. And that is not the Ignatian way, which is the way of *magis*, the way of giving greater glory to God.

It is in this light, therefore, that I invite all of you, friends and partners of LST, to join me and my team in accepting the challenges and invitations I have enumerated above. We pray and hope that we can indeed come up with a Strategic Plan that addresses the major and pressing concerns of LST. We are still in the Year of Hope, which our beloved Pope Francis declared last year. As members of the Church, we are pilgrims on a journey to the Kingdom of God. And we journey with and in hope, knowing that, as St. Paul says in his *Letter to the*

Romans, "hope does not disappoint or put us to shame, for the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

To end and to summarize, perhaps we can ask: what does it mean for LST to be a Jesuit theological school in these times? It is, first of all, to be a school rooted in the service of God and the Church, forming ministers and theologians who are deeply spiritual, doctrinally sound, and pastorally effective; second, a theological school at the frontiers—a laboratory of theological discernment that dares to engage the pressing spiritual, social, and cultural challenges of the Philippines, Asia, and beyond; third, a hub of global and local collaboration, a community of discerners and companions, its members bound together by a shared mission, listening to the Spirit, and fostering collaborative leadership rooted in spiritual freedom; and, finally, a place of formation that sends wise, loving, and courageous ministers, who are not only trained in orthodoxy but also capable of reading the signs of the times and reforming structures for God's work and mission.

These are bold aspirations, but much of this is already happening. Still, we aim for more—walking together, relying on God's help, and using our human, material, and spiritual resources. We journey together in hope, with St. Paul's words from *Philippians* to reassure us (4:13): "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Yes, we can do all things in Him who strengthens us. Once again, thank you very much for your presence and support of LST, and may the Good Lord bless all of us and the long journey ahead. *Kalemera*, good morning!

IN PRAISE OF LIMITS: A READING OF THE CREATION ACCOUNTS

Lorenzo Zura, SJ

Introduction

We increasingly live in a world where everyone is encouraged to prevail, to dominate, and to become "stronger" and more "competitive" than others, both on a personal level and among states and nations. On a personal level, we see someone as powerful if they can do whatever they want, with seemingly infinite possibilities and no limits. Similarly, on a broader scale, we view countries that act without restriction as more powerful than those that are not. Our culture is one of omnipotence that rejects all forms of limitation. Limits are viewed as negative, obstacles to be eliminated at any cost. This attitude may even stem, in part, from a misinterpretation of the omnipotence attributed to the Judeo-Christian God. Judeo-Christian religion has profoundly influenced modern culture, especially the Western one. The traditional understanding of the creation account often emphasizes the image of an omnipotent deity. However, as André Wénin[1], to whom I owe many of the insights for this paper, insightfully describes with the expression "the

1. André Wénin, *L'uomo biblico : letture nel Primo Testamento*, Epifania della Parola. N. S. Testi ermeneutici; 8 (Bologna: EDB, 2005); André Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo o l'errare dell'uomo. Lettura narrativa e antropologica della Genesi. I. Gen 1,1-12,4*, Testi e commenti (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2008).

I make extensive use of these texts, of which – whenever I quote – I will provide my own English translation/s, as there is no translated version available.

dominated domain:"[2] the depiction of God's power in Genesis is different. It is not that of a super-powerful deity reflecting our projections and dreams of superpower[3]. Instead, the Genesis account reveals the image of a meek and restrained God.

In this paper, I will explore the concept of limits and how they form the foundation of life. Indeed, limits are the *conditio sine qua non* for life to flourish. I will trace a unifying thread through the biblical narrative, revealing how limitations are present from the creation account, through the story of Adam and Eve, to the *Debarim YHWH* (the words of the Lord). In particular, I will examine it in the creation account, focusing both on the boundaries imposed upon the elements of primordial chaos and on God's self-imposed limitation. This second aspect becomes strikingly evident in the institution of Shabbat. Furthermore, interpreting the text through this lens offers a fresh perspective on the so-called "original sin." Finally, I will briefly analyze how limits are integral to the *Debarim YHWH*—limits provided to enable human beings to realize their full potential and achieve fulfillment.

Limits are a harbinger of life. I hope that these pages will help readers uncover the profound richness embedded in the concept of limitation and appreciate the invaluable insights offered by the Judeo-Christian tradition, beginning with the reading and interpretation of the indispensable *Bereshit*.

The Seven Days of Creation

Bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz

Thus begins the *Torah*, the first five books—Pentateuch—of the Bible, in its original language, Hebrew. Analyzing the

2. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico : letture nel Primo Testamento*, 33.

3. Paul Beauchamp, *Testamento biblico* (Magnano (BI): Edizioni Qiqajon, 2007), 21.

first chapter of Genesis, we may be surprised to discover how God created the world, because—if we read attentively and with a "new gaze," free from the influence of what we think we already know—it presents an unusual image of His power. Since childhood, we have been taught that God is omnipotent, and this is true: we find confirmation of this in the Biblical accounts. But what kind of power are we talking about? How is this power expressed in the Bible? I believe we often understand power through models we find in the world, both from personal and collective perspectives. Someone or something is powerful if it does not have limitations or restraints, having the possibility to do whatever he/she desire. However, these ideas do not correspond to the biblical concept of power, at least as conveyed in the creation account.

Who is speaking? The authorship of the first creation account

First of all, it is important to remember that the author of the first chapter of Genesis belongs to the "priestly" tradition, which focuses its entire message on the presence of the divine word in Moses and, through him, in Aaron (cf. Ex. 7:1-2)"[4]. The creation account "is the work of a man who does not speak at the time of creation, but at a specific time in history"[5]: it is the work of a "school of temple scribes, of the priestly order,"[6] inspired by the experience of exile following the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. This context led them to outline a vision of universal history and divine judgments through the framework of the seven days of creation, "sustained by the

4. Beauchamp, *Testamento biblico*, 13. Translation mine. I made my own translation, as there is no English translation available.

5. Beauchamp, *Testamento biblico*, 12.

6. Beauchamp, *Testamento biblico*, 24.

expectation of universal salvation."[7] Indeed, as Karl Löning and Erich Zenger observe, biblical figures, in moments of their greatest existential crises, refer to and appeal to the good order of creation. The narrative of origins expresses "the good beginning of their own experience,"[8] contrasting sharply with the painful and contradictory reality they were facing. Such an account reflects a distinct theological perspective, fitting into the dialectic between death and life, chaos and cosmos. "To use theological terminology, creation theology's particular '*Sitz im Leben*' is theodicy. It attained its first 'great' epoch in Israel during the crisis of the exile, when both Deutero-Isaiah and the Priestly document composed their versions of creation theology."[9] I believe this brief introduction allows us to appreciate the creation account more fully and deeply. It does not describe a beginning in a chronological or causal sense but presents a narrative that conveys theological, rather than historical or scientific, truths, through myths.[10]

Harmonious World – Harmonious Text

The first chapter of Genesis describes an orderly, harmonious world that comes into being as God speaks. And this harmonious universe is imitated by an equally harmonious ordering of the text.[11] It is first necessary to read the text. If

7. Beauchamp, *Testamento biblico*, 24.

8. Karl Löning and Erich Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created..: Biblical Theologies of Creation* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2000), 27.

9. Löning and Zenger, 27.

10. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York : Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 1–3, 6-7; Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 9–11; Löning and Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created..*, 9–10. Sarna is very forthright and resolute on this point, going so far as to state: "Hence, it is a naive and futile exercise to attempt to reconcile the biblical accounts of creation with the findings of modern science." Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 3.

11. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 13.

we read the text carefully, we can notice many repetitions that give this composition a regular rhythm. I would like to focus on how God works, in particular, until the fourth day. In addition, it is helpful to know that the abyss (*the deep*) mentioned in verse 2 refers to an immense mass of water, which the Creator divides in two through a vault, thereby creating space within. This space will be progressively ordered and prepared to sustain life.

> 1 In the beginning, when God created the heavens and
> the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness
> covered the face of the deep, while a wind from
> God swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said,
> "Let there be light" and there was light. 4 And God saw
> that the light was good; and God *separated* the light from
> the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness
> he called Night. And there was evening and there was
> morning, the first day.
>
> 6 And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the
> waters, and let it *separate* the waters from the waters." 7 So
> God made the dome and *separated* the waters that were
> under the dome from the waters that were above the
> dome. And it was so. 8 God called the dome Sky. And there
> was evening and there was morning, the second day.
>
> 9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be *gathered*
> *together into one place*, and let the dry land appear." And
> it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters
> that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw
> that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the earth put forth
> vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every
> kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And
> it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants
> yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind
> bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was
> good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning,
> the third day.

> [14] And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to *separate* the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, [15] and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. [16] God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. [17] God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, [18] to rule over the day and over the night, and to *separate* the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. [19] And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. (*Emphasis added*.)[12]

We can observe that God works primarily through acts of separation: in the first four days of creation, the verb *to separate* is repeated five times. Additionally, if we consider the expression *"gathered together into one place,"* which implicitly presupposes a separation, the count rises to six repetitions. He separates light from darkness, then divides space both vertically (separating the waters above the dome from those below) and horizontally (gathering the waters into one place so that dry land can appear). Notably, these separations address the chaotic elements described in verse 2: "on the first day, it is darkness from which God separates light; on the second day, the vault bisects the abyss of waters; finally, the earth emerges from chaos when it is separated from the waters."[13]

From what has just been said, it emerges that one of the permanent features of the creative action of Elohim of Genesis 1 is to separate, to distinguish, that is, to *set limits.*[14] For the transition from an initial chaotic state, it is necessary to place *limits* on the elements of chaos, not to eliminate them but to

12. For all the Bible quotations I refer to the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE).

13. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 16.

14. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 23.

confine and separate them, so that an orderly and harmonious universe can emerge[15]. The Hebrew words *tohu va-vohu* describe the initial state of chaos [16]—unformed (or formless) and void. As Sarna points out, the central theme of the narrative is that order is the result of divine action. [17] The *tohu va-vohu* stands in stark contrast to a created world. Without limits, the world would revert into a formless state, that is, a reversal of creation, as we can read in the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 4:23-27). These separations, and thus the limits imposed on the primordial chaotic elements, are essential for establishing things and beings in their identity and in relation to alterity. Moreover, because of these limits and separation of the primordial elements, each distinct thing can find its place in proper relationship with the whole so that the created world is "good" – "*tov*."

Other elements complete the description of the "uncreated" world. First, there is darkness, often associated with chaos (Is 45:19; Jer 4:24). Then there is *thôm*,[18] the abyssal waters of the primordial ocean—waters that, in the Bible, often carry ominous connotations (Jon 2:6; Ps 42:8)[19] and may symbolize the realm of death (Gen 7:11; Ex 15:5)[20]. There is

15. The concept of *creatio ex nihilo* is foreign to the First Testament mentality. "As Ibn Ezra observed, bara' does not itself denote the creation of something out of nothing (creatio ex nihilo). This doctrine seems to have been first articulated in the late Second Temple work, 2 Maccabees." Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publ. Soc, 1989), 5. However – according to Löning and Zenger – even the Bible texts, 2 Macc 7:28 and Wis 11:17, which are often adduced to biblically ground creatio ex nihilo, cannot be used for this purpose. Löning and Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created..*, 10.

16. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 6.

17. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 6.

18. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 6.

19. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 21.

20. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 21.

one last element that completes the scene, the *rûaḥ*, although its interpretation is the most delicate and there are multiple possible interpretations[21]. It is translated with "wind", which fits well into the general picture of primordial chaos, and it can be seen – according to Sarna – as "the agent by means of which the water is separated—that is, blown back—as in Genesis 8:1 at the conclusion of the Flood and in Exodus 14:21 at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds."[22] Wénin points out that in Hebrew, the term Elohim is sometimes used to create a form of superlative: in this case, *rûaḥ* Elohim could indicate a powerful storm "sweeping" over the surface of the waters.[23] "The fact remains that this would be the only instance in the Old Testament where the term *e'lohîm*, when associated with *rûaḥ* ('wind, breath, spirit'), would not refer to God Himself. Therefore, many prefer the more common interpretation: 'The wind of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.'"[24] Indeed, other possible interpretations, connecting *rûaḥ* with the next term (the verb *rḥp*, whose meaning is uncertain in Hebrew),[25] read it as divine creative and life-generating energy. Or, as a term "heralding the arrival of God,"[26] thus referring to His presence and immanence.[27] Wénin, in any case, prefers not to rob the text of its imaginative power and richness of meaning, and suggests reading the expression "sweeping over

21. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 21.

22. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 6.

23. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 21.

24. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 21.

25. "The verb *rḥp* is used twice more in the Hebrew Bible. It seems to describe a movement, an agitation. In Jer 23:9, it probably means to agitate, to move; in Deut 32:11, in an active form it describes the movement of an eagle circling above its young in the nest - hence the 'wheeling' usually taken up." Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 21.

26. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 6.

27. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 6.

the water" as "a quivering power, trembling, restrained as it is, suspended, waiting. As if God were calming his own power, ceasing to amplify the chaos" to the point of "modulating his own breath: 'And Elohim said, *yehî 'ôr*' (v. 3a)."[28]

> The beginning of the creative act for Elohim consists in restraining His own power—which, like any violent wind, could be a devastating, destructive force—and channeling it into a word. Thus, the presence of the 'wind of Elohim' in the prologue of creation implicitly introduces the theme that structures the entire poem: that of the creative word. The psalmist echoes this in his own way when he declares: 'By the word of Adonai, the heavens were made, and by the breath (*rûaḥ*) of His mouth, all their host' (Ps 33:6). The breath from God's mouth, His word, is nothing other than His wind: powerful, certainly, but restrained, calmed, controlled, and articulated. It loses none of the force of the breath that generates it, but transforms it into a creative power.[29]

Summarizing, God utilizes His "wind" as a powerful force, yet He restrains, stills, and modulates it into a creative word. This word does not eliminate the elements of chaos—which are inherently hostile to life—but instead sets limits and boundaries for them, allowing them to find their place in a harmonious world. "Divine power thus appears as a dominion exercised without destruction, without violence."[30] In fact, unlike other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) narratives, where creation results from a struggle between deities[31], here it is through the word that God exercises dominion over creation, affirming the image of a meek God. A final consideration regarding the power of God's word: the first term used by Elohim is not insignificant.

28. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 22.

29. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 22.

30. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 25.

31. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (London: SPBK Press, 1984), 81; Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 4–6.

It is the verb "to be," specifically conjugated in a form that expresses will: "Let there be!" (*yehi*)[32]. The interesting thing to note is that this verb, *hyh* (to be), is closely related to the name YHWH[33], which God will later reveal to Moses as His own name (Ex 3:14). This connection suggests that the creative word "flows from the divine name itself. It constitutes God's enactment of his own name, that is, of his own divine essence."[34]

The *Shabbat*[35]

An important point to highlight is that God, with each act of creation, pauses to stand at a distance and recognizes its beauty before proceeding to the next phase of His work. Indeed, seven times, we read "And God saw that it was good."

> This astonished pause is far from insignificant; on the contrary, it reveals something essential. In His creative act, Elohim is not merely content to deploy His power to bring order, transform, produce, and give life. He also knows how to suspend His power to behold—more precisely, to allow that which He has created to *be*, regarding it with a gaze that opens a space for its existence. This attitude, once again, carefully calibrates the dominion exercised elsewhere in the creative act.[36]

This aspect of distancing and wonder becomes even more evident at the culmination of the sixth day. The seventh day,

32. "IsraelBiblicalStudies.Com," https://lp.israelbiblicalstudies.com/lp_iibs_biblical_hebrew_let_there_be_light-en.html (accessed November 22, 2024).

33. "IsraelBiblicalStudies.Com;" Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 22.

34. P. Beauchamp, *Etudes Sur La Genèse: L'Eden, Les Sept Jours, Les Patriarches*, Cours Travaux et Conférences (Faculté de théologie de Fourvière, 1971), 56–57. (my translation).

35. Due to the brevity of this paper, I cannot fully elaborate on the profound richness of Shabbat. Here, I will focus solely on the aspect of Shabbat that supports my thesis: namely, that Shabbat reveals the meekness of the divine omnipotence.

36. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 25.

Shabbat, is a day set apart and consecrated, during which Elohim—issuing no commands and producing nothing—completes creation. The seventh day appears as a "superfluous" day, as "it brings neither new works nor any chronological extension and yet it is this day that concludes the work of creation and that paradoxically – in that it does so again and thus 'superfluously' – completes the completed world."[37] The idea that this day represents the fulfillment of creation is underscored by a close parallelism in Genesis 2:2, where the verbs "to rest" (*shabat*) and "to fulfill" or "to accomplish" (*kalah*) correspond, functioning as synonyms, "according to the rule of the Hebrew parallelism."[38]

And on the seventh day	God *accomplished*	the work that he had done
on the seventh day	he *rested*	from all the work that he had done.[39]

According to the creation narrative, it is precisely the withdrawal of Elohim—the cessation of His work—that brings creation to its completion. Without this divine self-restraint, creation would remain unfinished. He thus demonstrates that God imposes a limit on His own ability to dominate, showing Himself to be "stronger than His own strength, master of His own dominion."[40] Through *Shabbat*, God distances Himself from creation, opening a space for what is not Him—a space of life and autonomy for His creatures; hence His delegation of power to the stars and humanity. As Paul Beauchamp – a French Jesuit, theologian, and exegete – superbly and uniquely describes, "The Sabbath once again emphasizes the gentleness

37. Kurt Appel, ed., *In Praise of Mortality: Christianity and New Humanism* (Paderborn, Germany: Brill | Schöningh, 2022), 3, https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657791248.

38. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 26.

39. I just changed the order of the verbs in order to show this parallelism more clearly.

40. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 26.

at the heart of God's image. A law of gentleness that corrects the projections of an all-powerful God, confused with our dream of superpower, that is, a God made in our image."[41] In this sense, the omnipotence of God is nothing but the meekness of one who remains master even of His own power. Not the meekness of the weak, who have no other choice, but the meekness that is a "strength stronger than strength."[42] To better appreciate the kind of meekness being discussed, we can turn to Mary Karr's wonderful poem, *"Who the Meek Are Not."*

Not the bristle-bearded Igors bent
under burlap sacks, not peasants knee-deep
in the rice-paddy muck,
nor the serfs whose quarter-moon sickles
make the wheat fall in waves
they don't get to eat. My friend the Franciscan
nun says we misread
that word meek in the Bible verse that blesses them.
To understand the meek
(she says) picture a great stallion at full gallop
in a meadow, who—
at his master's voice— seizes up to a stunned
but instant halt.
So with the strain of holding that great power
in check, the muscles
along the arched neck keep eddying,
and only the velvet ears
prick forward, awaiting the next order.[43]

41. Beauchamp, *Testamento biblico*, 21.

42. "But a definition of gentleness, of meekness, as a strength stronger than strength is, at the same time, necessary to reject a preferential option for weakness, dictated by the resentment of those who lack strength." Beauchamp, *Testamento biblico*, 21.

43. Kerr, Mary. "Who the meek are not" in *The Turning aside: The Kingdom Poets Book of Contemporary Christian Poetry*, The Poiema Poetry Series, edited by D. S. Martin (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), Kindle.

So the Bible, particularly through the principle of Shabbat, appeals for intentional self-restraint—"a call for an intentional self-limiting of human striving and ambition."[44] To better illustrate this appeal, I will briefly introduce the concept of *tzimtzum*, strictly connected to the *Shabbat* theology.

TzimTzum

I connect my reflection to the Jewish mystical approach to interpreting and reading the Bible. I feel reassured that I am not straying far from Jewish tradition by using this particular lens, as Gershom Scholem, known for his work on Kabbalah, wrote that mysticism is "a legitimate form that Jews have resorted to understand themselves and the external world, a form that expresses their religious experiences and historical transformations, but also their mortal or life-bearing crises."[45]

Tzimtzum is a term from Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition, that plays a central role in the work of Isaac Luria, one of the leading figures of the Kabbalistic school of Safed. The term literally means "contraction," and it refers to God's act of withdrawing to create space—making room for His creation. [46] "According to Torah, before the creation of the world as we know it, everything was filled with *Ohr Ein Sof*. [...] But if God

44. Kathryn Schifferdecker, "Sabbath and Creation," *Word & World* 36, no. 3 (July 1, 2016): 210.

45. Luca Miele, "Quando Dio trattenne il fiato - La creazione secondo la mistica ebraica," *L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO*, January 16, 2010, https://www.vatican.va/news_services/or/or_quo/cultura/2010/012q04a1.html (*my translation*).

46. Sanford Drob, "Tzimtzum: A Kabbalistic Theory of Creation," *The Jewish Review*, 3, no. 5 (April 1990), https://thejewishreview.org/articles/?id=121; Miele, "Quando Dio trattenne il fiato."

fills everything and is Himself everything, if all space is filled with the *Ohr Ein Sof*, how could He create something new?"[47]

Without delving into Isaac Ben Luria's intricate and complex theory, the concept of *tzimtzum* can serve as a fascinating and inspiring key to understanding our own presence. We must also dispel a common historical misunderstanding: the idea that *tzimtzum* is a cosmogonic concept, akin to describing how the universe was formed, as in the Big Bang theory. This misconception partly arises from the profound interactions between Kabbalah and humanistic-Renaissance culture[48]. Think, for example, of figures like Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno, and Copernicus, who initiated cosmogonic reflections, often drawing on Kabbalistic thought. In doing so, however, they transformed Luria's vision into a cosmogony[49]. According to Davide Assael, a Jewish-born Italian philosopher and theologian, this retraction of God can be understood as an interpretation of the first verse of the Torah—though not within the Brunian and cosmological-Renaissance framework[50]. Drawing on the insights of the great medieval biblical commentator Rashi, Assael asserts that the Torah is fundamentally a book of ethics[51]. Rashi even suggests that the Torah could have started with Exodus 12:2: "This month shall be unto you the first of the months" [52]—the first commandment given to Israel—marking

47. Michal Osham, "*Tzimtzum*: The Jewish Practice of Making Space," *RealClear Religion*, May 4, 2021, https://www.realclearreligion.org/articles/2021/05/04/tzimtzum_the_jewish_practice_of_making_space_775643.html.

48. Davide Assael, "Tzimtzum (the Withdrawal of God)," Jan 17, 2023, Video of lecture https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4ZjeQ1LOOo.

49. Assael, "Tzimtzum (the Withdrawal of God)."

50. Assael, "Tzimtzum (the Withdrawal of God)."

51. Assael, "Tzimtzum (the Withdrawal of God)."

52. Rashi, "Genesis 1:3," Sefaria, accessed November 11, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1.3?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en.

the Exodus from Egypt, the ethical foundation of Jewish identity.

From this perspective, *tzimtzum* is not merely an account of creation, but rather it applies to every generative process. The Torah, then, is describing a process akin to when parents step back to make room for their child's growth and development, or when a teacher withdraws to allow space for the student's learning and progress. Every act of generation necessitates a moment of retraction. This withdrawal is not only foundational to creation, but it also exemplifies Jewish ethics better than any other concept. *Tzimtzum*, indeed, can be taken as a paradigm to understand Jewish ethics, which is an "ethics of freedom"[53]—an ethics grounded in the withdrawal of the creator to make space for the autonomy of the other. This is also an indication for us: every time we step back, exercise our self-restraint, we create space for something else to grow and flourish in the emptiness we leave behind. "*Tzimtzum* shows us that, if we learn how to take up less space for ourselves and make more space for others, our sense of fulfillment, joy, and meaning doesn't diminish—it increases."[54]

God Delegates His Power

Shabbat also has a connection with what precedes it in the narrative, namely, with the mission God entrusts to human beings. Indeed, Shabbat opens a "space of freedom"[55] for humanity, for man and woman, where they can act responsibly and be, in turn, "creators, exercising effective dominion."[56] This

53. Assael, "Tzimtzum (the Withdrawal of God)."

54. Osham, "Tzimtzum."

55. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico : letture nel Primo Testamento*, 15.

56. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 15.

is our calling: to be co-creators! In this way, we can become who we are: the image and likeness of God.

A second[57] aspect of divine power is the gift of life, evident in the teeming, life-filled creation of plants and living beings. God makes plants fruitful and blesses the animals of the sky, sea, and land, including humanity, to multiply and flourish. In this way, God acts as a "generous creator, who does not try to keep fruitfulness under control, so that life can develop without him."[58] Furthermore, He does not hesitate to delegate His power to certain creatures: the stars are entrusted with the task of marking time, and human beings are entrusted with the care of the earth's space. Once again, we see how God's power manifests as restrained and unobtrusive.[59]

The Likeness of God: A Vocation

Regarding the creation of the human being, certain peculiarities stand out.[60] When the narrator describes what Elohim does (Gen 1:27), he uses the verb "to create" – *bara'* – three times instead of the verb, in its plural form, "to make" – *'asah* –, which was used in the previous verse (Gen 1:26)[61]. The verb *bara'*, "in the Hebrew Bible, does not mean 'to make out of nothing' but rather 'to bring forth something new, unseen, or unheard of,' and it is distinctive in that its subject is always and exclusively God."[62]. On the other hand, the verb *'asah* has

57. In addition to what we analyzed above—namely, the ability to bring forth a harmonious and orderly cosmos by placing limits and separations on the elements of chaos.

58. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 25.

59. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 25.

60. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 27–29.

61. "Genesis 1 Interlinear Bible," https://biblehub.com/interlinear/genesis/1.htm (accessed November 21, 2024).

62. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 28.

a much broader meaning. Why, then, does the text switch verbs, and why does it shift to the singular? Wénin highlights three additional differences between God's announcement of the "plan" (Gen 1:26) and its "execution" as reported by the narrator (Gen 1:27).[63]

[26] Then Elohim said,

"Let us make (הֶעֱשֶׂה נ)
humankind in our *image*,
according to our *likeness*;

and let them have
dominion over the fish
of the sea, and over the
birds of the air, and over
the cattle, and over all
the wild animals of the
earth, and over every
creeping thing that
creeps upon the earth."

[27] So Elohim created (אֶת־בּ)
humankind in his *image*,
in the *image* of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

[28] God blessed them, and God
said to them, "Be fruitful and
multiply, and fill the earth and
subdue it; and have dominion
over the fish of the sea and over
the birds of the air and over
every living thing that moves
upon the earth."

In Gen 1:26, Elohim mentions both image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demut*) to describe the relationship between Him and the human being, but in Gen 1:27, the term *likeness* is omitted. The narrator repeats the term *image* twice but does not mention *likeness.* Moreover, another notable difference is the introduction of the phrase *"male and female"* by the narrator, which was absent from the original announcement. Finally, the creation of the human being is not followed by the usual refrain, *"And God saw that it was good."*

63. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 27–29. These differences become more apparent when we analyze the verses in parallel.

Wénin argues that these subtle differences are deliberate literary devices used by the author to suggest that the human being is created unfinished.[64] He notes that the refrain formula is also absent at the end of the second day of creation, where the work remains incomplete: separating the waters is not enough to make the space habitable; *"the dry land"* must also appear (Gen 1:9) before the refrain *"tov"* is appropriate. This notion of incompleteness could also explain the omission of *likeness.* According to Wénin, "The human certainly bears within itself the image of God, but it is not (yet) resembling, as the human also shares a crude sexuality ('male and female') with the animals.[65] It is as if the human being is positioned in a median state between divinity and animality."[66] Starting from what has just been said—namely, the incompleteness of the human—one could understand the difference between the verbs used for the project and the execution.

> When, in verse 27, the text recounts that God *creates* humanity, it precisely indicates that He fulfills His part, as He alone is capable of '*creating*.' However, after accomplishing this 'creation,' not everything is yet *'done*.' On the contrary, once God has completed His part, there is still work to be done.[67]

What is missing is precisely what the human being has to "do" to bring his or her being to completion, to make the image become likeness. Elohim points out that, immediately

64. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 27–29.

65. On this point, Sarna disagrees: "No such sexual differentiation is noted in regard to animals. Human sexuality is of a wholly different order from that of the beast." Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 13.

66. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 29. On this, however, Sarna agrees with this reading: "[T]he dual nature of humankind, the creatureliness and earthiness as well as the Godlike qualities." Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 11.

67. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 29.

after the creation of humanity, a way to work out one's incompleteness. He called humanity to "be fruitful and multiply," to "subdue" (*kavash*) the earth, and to "have dominion" (*radah*) over other creatures. That is, he commands them to act like him, whose dominion—however—is not manifested in exploiting the creation at will and without regard, but in caring for it. Indeed, we have argued that divine power is deeply inhabited by meekness. This mandate involves a responsibility to "subdue" so that creation flourishes. It also calls us to "rule" with care, not severity. Humanity is to oversee creation as God would, embodying His stewardship and exercising power in the way God exercises His own power.[68] In essence, this means serving as God's representative on earth—His co-regent and co-creator—acting in harmony with His purposes and ensuring creation thrives under their care. An indication of this invitation to exercise one's dominion without violence, that is, to limit one's power over the animal, is the gift of plant food:[69] to mankind, every plant yielding seed and the fruits of the trees, while to the animals, every green plant (Gn 1:29-30).

> With the words of Paul Beauchamp: "What qualifies the image [of God] is not only supremacy but, equally, the manner in which this dominion is exercised. It is the dietary regime that presupposes precisely a peaceful form of this exercise." This implies that man, like God, knows how to give himself a *limit*: that of respect for the life and place of the animal. [70]

There is more: the animality that Elohim entrusts to humanity to dominate is not only external but also internal. According to Wénin, as we have already mentioned, "male and female"

68. Maurizio Teani, "Il vangelo della creazione," *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, February 2016, https://www.aggiornamentisociali.it/articoli/il-vangelo-della-creazione/.

69. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 30.

70. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 30–31.

are an indication of our proximity to the animal, and such animality could be related to sexuality and desire[71]. Therefore, if we consider such speculations reliable, Elohim's invitation would also be to learn to master the life force in us, to *set a limit* to desire. The risk otherwise is that it will result in violence. It appears, then, that becoming human perhaps means learning to master, to tame animality with its potentials that we have in us. "Making humanity appear is then tantamount to becoming the 'shepherd of one's own animality.'"[72]

Indeed, if we have said that God-likeness is not already given to man but is a vocation we are called to undertake, then we must turn toward Him. If He rules with meekness, with His word, then perhaps we too must learn to rule the forces of our inner chaos not with violence, but through the meek power of his word.

Was the serpent right or wrong?

Generally, the representation of salvation history that seems to emerge from the biblical account is a linear narrative with causal links. In the beginning, God created a perfect universe—Eden, the earthly paradise—where humanity could lead a happy and peaceful life. Then comes the transgression of the divine command, which is punished by suffering, arduous labor, and death. To remedy this situation, God sends the Savior, who restores the original condition and opens the way to life for those who believe in Him.

Wénin argues that this linear representation of salvation history too easily and superficially adopts the serpent's assumptions.[73] The serpent presents a God who is superior to

71. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 31.

72. Wénin, *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 32.

73. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 13, 19–22.

human beings, jealous of this superiority, and thus frames the relationship between God and humanity as one of competition. We can also find this idea in the work of the well-known Italian biblical scholar and cardinal, Carlo Maria Martini,

> Humanity has not trusted in God's plan of love since Adam, because Adam's sin arose from the profound suspicion that God, at heart, issued the prohibition out of jealousy toward humanity. This suspicion of God as a competitor, a rival to humanity, lies at the root of many forms of atheism: the belief that God must die so that humanity can truly live![74]

The second creation account and the so-called "fall" account[75] (Gen. 2:4–3:24) plays a central role in shaping and understanding this linear representation.[76] God creates man and provides everything for his happiness: life, a garden, animals, and a woman. Yet, all of this seems contingent on obedience to a prohibition. If the man transgresses this command, he will die (Gen. 2:17). The serpent, skillfully and cunningly, focuses attention on the law, presenting it as a "frustrating prohibition"[77] (Gen. 3:1), thereby diminishing the significance of all the gifts God has given. It is the serpent, in fact, who insinuates that God possesses knowledge, presenting this as an enviable superiority, saying: "For God *knows* that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, *knowing* good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

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74. Carlo Maria Martini, "Due pellegrini per la giustizia: Giuseppe d'Egitto e Ignazio di Loyola," in *I grandi della Bibbia : esercizi spirituali con l'Antico Testamento*, ed. Laura Invernizzi, vol. 7, Opere (Firenze: Bompiani, 2022), chap. 3, sec. 6, Kindle. (*my translation*).

75. Calling Gen 3 the "fall" is an inaccuracy derived from the concept of the fall of the soul in Platonic philosophy, which viewed material existence negatively in contrast to the soul's existence.

76. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 15.

77. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 16.

Wénin suggests an alternative reading of the text: considering all the gifts God bestows on man for his flourishing, the divine order—this "word that puts order,"[78] which he proposes should be understood as a "friend's advice"[79] rather than a prohibition born of God's jealousy, it becomes a *limit* that defines a space for the other. The desire to suppress this limit originates from a "totalizing will,"[80] which inevitably disrupts relational harmony and leads to death. Death, in this reading, is not a divine punishment but the natural consequence of this totalizing desire that allows no room for alterity—whether the others or the Other—thereby denying it. Indeed, "to deny the other is to die."[81]

> In this sense, God seeks to protect humanity from death, which consists in wanting to hoard everything for oneself. To want to hoard everything is to close oneself to the relationship. Now, it is precisely the relationship that is vital, in the Bible as in life. Like the gift, the limit would, therefore, also be for life since it is openness to the relationship.[82]

The limit, therefore, becomes the *conditio* of possibility for happiness and life. So, it follows from all of this that if one rejects one's limitations and tries to be everything, one endangers relationships. Since we are fundamentally relational beings, this also endangers one's own existence. The fault of Adam and Eve, through this lens, would be their belief in the serpent's portrayal of limitation as a lack, a deficiency, something negative that prevents one from living life to the fullest. This is the exact opposite of what we are attempting

78. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 16.

79. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 41–42.

80. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 16.

81. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 39.

82. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 42.

to demonstrate here. "The error is not to take the limit as a possibility of life and fulfillment in fullness [...] the fault is to give in to the fear of losing, of not having everything; to give in to the fear of lacking."[83]

A similar, albeit more philosophically developed, perspective is articulated by Kurt Appel, professor of Fundamental Theology and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Vienna. He argues that the serpent's insidious question (Gen. 3:3-4) effectively displaces the forbidden tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—to the center stage, taking the place of the tree of life.[84] In the first passage (Gen. 2:8-9), where the tree of life and the tree of knowledge are mentioned, it is explicitly stated that the tree of life is in the middle of the garden, while the tree of knowledge is not clearly located. It is, so to speak, an addition, something that resists precise placement. In the second passage, where the tree of knowledge is mentioned (Gen. 2:15-17), it assumes a more central position: "This is its first displacement from the 'placeless place' to a (negative) place of prohibition. Still, the tree is not localized any further and thus remains apart from man."[85] With the serpent's question, the tree of knowledge takes center stage and is thus placed at the heart of human desire. In this sense, the snake is already the embodiment of desire, that is, the projection of desire, not just an external tempter."[86] Therefore, the tree of knowledge from its "placeless place" now moves to the center of desire, stimulating an attempt at appropriation. Until then, the tree of knowledge in its extraterritoriality represented a protective layer through which the human being

83. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 43.

84. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 7.

85. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 7.

86. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 7.

was, in a sense, reclothed. Man did not have to be ashamed of his nakedness because the *self-decentering* gap in his field of vision, bestowed by this tree, prevented him from creating an absolute projection for his self."[87]

For Appel, when the tree of knowledge remains in its extra-territoriality, it symbolizes self-deprivation—that is, the process through which the ego moves from the center of life to its margins, a necessary condition for opening oneself to the other. As the tree of knowledge advances toward the center, it becomes part of humanity and symbolizes "[t]he projection of one's own desire (and self-oriented desire)."[88] This projection

> then takes the form of the tempting snake before finally, at the moment of absolute assimilation, morphing into the terror of absolute nothingness, the knowledge of one's own nakedness—in other words, the void associated with unmediated presence and loss of detachment (we might compare this to the meaninglessness of pornographic presence).[89]

In other words, the tree of knowledge, in its non-localizability, represented a protective layer that safeguarded man's unavailability. His desire could not become all-encompassing because of this layer, which thus served as a limit in relation to everything else given by God ("you may freely eat of every tree of the garden"). This limit was not imposed out of jealousy but rather to protect man from his own desire. The moment this protective layer moves within the human horizon, becoming "manageable" (i.e., "eatable"), it is lost. "Hence the divine measures (distance from the tree of life and from paradise,

87. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 8.

88. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 8.

89. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 8.

imposing mortality over man) seem like restitution measures, *simulacra* of the original protection."[90]

This is a brilliant insight, in my opinion: to consider death a gift—albeit an extreme one—that God gives to human beings. Death becomes the extreme attempt of a God who wants to protect us "from the annihilating emptiness of the totality of our desiring gaze, insofar as we are detached from ourselves and each other in death. [...] In this sense, death becomes the last tragic safeguard, separating the human subject from his own gaze—that is, from total self-objectification as his own double, which would confront us with the ultimate horror."[91]

Re-reading salvation history in a way that moves beyond a simplistic and linear perspective,[92] the Incarnation is not—first of all—a consequence of sin but rather the expression of God's love and His desire for communion with us. "God and man are so little competitors that in Jesus they live together in communion. In him the serpent's lie is radically and decisively exposed."[93]

The Law

When someone refuses to accept limits and leave her own desires uncontrolled, relationships degenerate into violence, destruction, and death. This violence must be restrained, and this is where the law comes in. "By placing a limit on the

90. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 9.

91. Appel, *In Praise of Mortality*, 9.

92. This perspective views the necessity of redemption—the saving act of Jesus Christ—as a consequence of original sin. We can refer to this as the "standard version" of original sin theology, which gained prominence from St. Augustine onward.Lluis Oviedo, "Original Sin: The New Scientific Context as Challenge and Opportunity," *Theology and Science* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 99–118, https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2021.2012926.

93. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 19.

omnipotence of desire, the law opens the individual to the recognition of the other and thus to the relationship that allows one to live."[94]

I am not permitted here, due to brevity, to elaborate on the intriguing theme of the Law, *Debarim YHWH*, as a continuation of this limitation that enables human beings to realize themselves fully.[95] I will, however, briefly mention two aspects that illustrate this point.

First, just consider the words of self-presentation that the Lord provides in both versions of the "Ten Words" (Exo 20:2–17; Deut 5:6–21): "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." In this, He defines and presents Himself as a saving and liberating Lawgiver—oxymoronic as that may sound. Thus, the words, precepts, and laws that the Lord entrusts to the people of Israel—on a deeper reading—"speak of Israel's freedom, freedom that the first word sets as its foundation."[96] This freedom is fundamental for God to establish a covenant with free beings.

Second, we can appreciate this aspect through the Shabbat Law (Exo 20:8-11),

> Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do

94. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 36.

95. I have recently discovered that this understanding of the law is not exclusive to the Judeo-Christian tradition but is also present in the Buddhist tradition. In Buddhism, there are five "precepts." The Sanskrit word for these is *Śīla*, which also means "ethics" in general. "In his Sanskrit dictionary, he specified the concept with an example: 'The Śīla of fire is to burn.' Thus, the guidelines of Buddhist ethics are the true nature, just as the nature of fire is to burn." That is, as we are saying, following the precepts bring to fruition and manifest our true nature within us. Chandra Candiani, *Il silenzio è cosa viva: L'arte della meditazione* (Torino: Einaudi, 2018), 77.

96. Wénin, *L'uomo biblico*, 105.

> any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

As we have already noted, it calls for voluntary self-restraint and the imposition of limits on human greed. "It is, of course, a word of law. For those who have ears to hear, however, it is also a word of promise,"[97] because it liberates us from the countless bondages we unknowingly bear: "We are laboring under 'the yoke of greed,' and we have put the yoke on our own necks."[98]

Like Father, Like Son

I believe that, in one way or another, we actually become the image of God. The question is: What image of God do I have within me? Adam and Eve desired to become like the God the serpent described to them—a God who is superior, distant, and jealous of His superiority. Yet, they seemed uninterested in becoming like the God who creates through the word, restrains and channels His power, gives everything to human beings, and delegates to them the power to dominate. This is likely because the latter is not the image of God they carried.

Thus, it becomes crucial for each person to ask: *What image of God do I hold?* This image profoundly influences how one behaves, what one aspires to become, and where one directs their desires. When I speak of the idea of God, I refer to what the well-known theologian Paul Tillich articulated: the idea of God represents what is ultimately important or of ultimate

97. Schifferdecker, "Sabbath and Creation," 209.

98. Schifferdecker, "Sabbath and Creation," 216.

concern in one's life—even for an atheist.[99] In his work *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich defines faith as "the state of being ultimately concerned."[100] This ultimate concern is what fundamentally shapes a person's values and commitments, transcending specific doctrines or religious affiliations. The American writer David Foster Wallace shares a similar perspective,

> [H]ere's something else that's true. In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is *what* to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship – be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles – is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things – if they are where you tap real meaning in life – then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. On one level, we all know this stuff already – it's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, bromides, epigrams, parables: the skeleton of every great story. The trick is keeping the truth up–front in daily consciousness. Worship power, you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart – you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on.[101]

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99. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith.*, 1st edition (New York: Harper Colophon, 1978), 1–3.

100. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 1.

101. David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*, 1st edition (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), chap. 1, Kindle.

From this emerges how deep and incisive the image of God (or idols) we hold within us truly is. This invites us to a profound examination of that image, lest it become an idol—just consider the dangers of religious fundamentalism. On it depends our freedom or our enslavement. Will we, then, follow the demanding path of freedom—suggested to us by God and His *debarim*—or will we choose to surrender to our bondages, afraid to face our "deserts," like the people of Israel when they complained to Moses, "For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?" (Exo 14:12)

Conclusion

The God who emerges from the first pages of Genesis is a God who creates through the word, without violence and without eliminating the elements of chaos, but by separating them and placing a *limit* on them. He is a God, therefore, who is capable of being stronger than his own strength by placing a *limit* on it. He is a God who rejoices in his creation, who delegates—and thus *limits*—his power of dominion to his creatures, particularly to the human being. He is a God who withdraws—that is, *limits* himself—to make space for his creation. This is especially evident in the concepts of Shabbat and *tzimtzum*. In this space inaugurated by God's retreat, the possibility of a covenant emerges—a relationship that, without this retreat, would otherwise amount to mere subjugation.

From all this, we derive that his power is best expressed by the word "meekness," with the cautions and specifications we outlined earlier. Since we are created "in his image and likeness," if we truly wish to exercise dominion over creation, we should do so according to the model of dominion shown to us by God. That is, a dominion capable of limiting its claim to wholeness, making room for the other, allowing it to grow

without seeking to subjugate, conquer, or "consume" ("eat") the other.

This image of God can also help us cultivate healthier relationships among ourselves and with the world. In a time of ecological crisis and of a "World War III in pieces," as Pope Francis calls it, we need more than ever to reassess the values that inspire and guide our daily choices.

In this short paper, I aimed to show that limits, far from being something negative, are a source of life and fullness. I believe that if we embrace what the limit can teach us, we will emerge from this time of global crisis more mature, more fulfilled, and more human (and therefore more divine).

GLIMPSES OF JOY IN THE BEGINNING OF THE LUCAN GOSPEL: A NARRATIVE-CRITICAL READING OF LK 1:5-2:52[1]

Jieqi Huang, CSIC

Introduction

Lucan scholars have long recognized the writer of the third Gospel as an exceedingly skilled and sophisticated storyteller whose masterpiece has attracted both ordinary readers and academic researchers. Moreover, the Gospel according to Luke, replete with the theme of joy, is acclaimed as the "Gospel of Joy."[2] As Marshall points out, "The note of joy sounds throughout Luke-Acts."[3] Bo Reicke observes the frequency with which Luke explores the theme of joy, "No other Evangelist or writer in the New Testament deals so often with the idea of joy as Luke."[4]

In line with the genre that Luke defines as narrative, this paper applies the narrative-critical approach to explore the theme of joy in the Lucan Gospel. This approach allows the

1. This article is based on an excerpt from the author's master's thesis entitled *Glimpses of the Pattern of Joy in the Lucan Gospel: A Narrative Critical Reading of Lk 1:5-2:52.*

2. William G. Morrice, *Joy in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), 91.

3. I. Marshall Howard, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 3. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 56.

4. Bo Ivar Reicke, *The Gospel of Luke*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964), 77.

readers to immerse themselves in the Lucan narrative, experiencing the Gospel message and encountering God's love and joy in a profound and transformative manner. D. M. Rhoads, who pioneered the approach, derived the theoretical framework from the secular literary critic Seymour Chatman, according to whom the narrative is to be studied as a literary whole and has two levels of communication: story and discourse. The story level is the "what" of the narrative, comprising settings, characters, and events. The discourse level is the "how" of the narrative, concerned with how the given story is told. It includes rhetorical devices and an evaluative point of view. More specifically, the contrast between the "what" and the "how" of the narrative can be exemplified by comparing a particular episode in the synoptic Gospels. Although they share similar events (the "what"), their presentation and interpretation (the "how") vary, resulting in distinct theological implications. Simply stated, the author influences the reader's understanding through the "what" and the "how" of the narrative.

Settings

Social Setting

Luke situates his stories "in the days of Herod the Great" (v. 5), a time that suggests that the Jews were under the control of the Romans through a tyrannical client-king.[5] The loss of political sovereignty led to an increasing emphasis on the coming of the eschatological messiah.[6] On the other hand, the phrase "in the days of" is reminiscent of the language of the beginning

5. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 64.

6. Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (UK: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1995), 54.

of a few prophetic books, which reminds the readers of God's interactions with Israel.[7] So, the infancy narratives unfold against the backdrop of the "political turmoil of the Roman occupation of Palestine," a period characterized by rampant eschatological anticipation.[8]

Spatial Setting

The initial narrative takes place in the sanctuary of the temple, the center of Jerusalem, and the dwelling place of God. The specific setting is the "altar of incense" in the Holy Place, separated from the Holy of Holies by a curtain.[9] It is the second most sacred space, only surpassed by the holy of the holies, which can only be accessed by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.[10] Such "a privileged setting and an intense locus of communication with the divine"[11] calls the readers' attention to the momentous events unfolding in this sacred space.

Temporal Setting

The narrative unfolds during the daily incense at the temple. The offerings occur twice a day, at dawn and dusk

7. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 64.

8. Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 8-9.

9. Talley, "A Narrative-Critical Interpretation of Allusions to Abraham in the Lukan Infancy Narrative" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 59. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/narrative-critical-interpretation-allusions/docview/2108943544/se-2 (accessed January 5, 2024).

10. Michael Colin McKeever, "Sacred Space and Discursive Field: The Narrative Function of the Temple in Luke-Acts" (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1999), 57. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/sacred-space-discursive-field-narrative-function/docview/304501626/se-2 (accessed June 30, 2024).

11. Ibid., 58.

(Exod. 30:7-8).[12] The assembly waiting outside during the incense offering echoes the event in which the Angel Gabriel visited the prophet Daniel in the temple during the evening incense offering.[13] This resonance signifies that it is time for the evening offering, for only the evening offering will coincide with the prayer time of the assembly.

Chiastic Structure of the Plot Development

Building on Green's analysis, Kuhn found the following four-level chiastic structure in 1:5-25, with the announcement of the good news serving as the central element:[14]

A Faithful Couple, yet Barren Elizabeth (vv. 5-7)
  B Service, Sanctuary, People (vv. 8-10)
    C Angel's appearance and Zechariah's Response (vv. 11-12)
      D Announcement of "Good News" (vv. 13-17; cf. v. 19)
    C` Zechariah's Objection and Angel's Response (vv. 18-20)
  B` People, Sanctuary, Service (vv. 21-23)
A` Pregnant Elizabeth Offers Faithful Praise (vv. 24-25)

The discussion of each level follows below.

A: Faithful Couple; Barren Elizabeth (vv. 5-7)

The first section begins with the portrait of a couple from priestly lineage. In addition to their ancestral purity, Luke uses two parallel phrases to highlight the moral excellence of this couple in light of God's standard.[15] They are "righteous" in the eyes of "God", "observing all the commandments and

12. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 68.

13. Howard, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 54.

14. Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Heart of Biblical Narrative: Rediscovering Biblical Appeal to the Emotions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 71. https://zh.z-lib.fm/book/16791204/453861/the-heart-of-biblical-narrative-rediscovering-biblical-appeal-to-the-emotions.html (accessed April 13, 2024).

15. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 65.

ordinances" of the "Lord" blamelessly (v. 6).[16] The implied readers may expect that this blameless couple would have received all kinds of blessings in their lives. They are burdened with the shame of childlessness, viewed within biblical Judaism as a state of divine curse or punishment.[17] Yet, this devout and childless couple might evoke the memories of the implied readers of some biblical figures who faced a similar tragedy: Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 16), Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 25:21-26), Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 30:22-24), Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:3-25), and Elkanah and Hannah (1Sam. 1:1-20).[18] The mention of advanced age makes the story of Abraham and Sarah stand out among these biblical allusions (Gen. 17:1). Besides, the words "righteous" and "blamelessly," which appear in the Abrahamic episode, confirm the readers' association of Zechariah and Elizabeth with the OT couple (cf. Gen. 15:6; 17:1).[19] That association rouses the expectation of the implied readers that God would do something for Zechariah and Elizabeth, just as he did for their ancestors.

B: Service, Sanctuary, People (vv. 8-10)

This part is framed by three themes: Zechariah's priestly service, temple, and the people (cf. vv. 8-11; 21-23).[20]

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16. Ibid.

17. Gregory J. Polan, "Joy Mixed with Crisis: The Birth Narratives in the Gospels," *The Bible Today* 55, 6 (2017): 412.

18. Jae Wang. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56: An Inquiry into Luke's Literary Techniques" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1996), 5. In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/annunciation-narratives-luke- 1-5-56-inquiry-into/docview/304287222/se-2 (accessed January 5, 2024), 85.

19. Joel B. Green, "The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1–2," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994): 69-70.

20. McKeever, "Sacred Space and Discursive Field: The Narrative Function of the Temple in Luke-Acts," 55.

The priesthood is divided into twenty-four divisions, with each group serving for one week, twice a year.[21] Given a large number of priests, the selection of priests who will offer the incense is done by lot, and the lot is carefully restricted to priests who have never been selected.[22] In wider Greek thought, the casting of lots was understood as a way of circumventing human will, so Luke's mention of this custom affirms the divine will at work.[23] Consequently, Zechariah's opportunity to carry out the incense offering is presented as a once-in-a-lifetime honor.

Outside the sanctuary is the whole assembly of the people. The expression "the whole assembly" implies the entire nation.[24] The offering of incense inside the temple and the people praying outside create a corporate, solemn atmosphere.[25] In the midst of this deeply religious atmosphere, the angel comes.

C: Angel's Appearance and Zechariah's Response (vv. 11-12)

The angel of God appears at the right side of the altar, the side of favor.[26] Zechariah's response typifies the expected reaction of an individual who directly experiences a divine manifestation.[27] Luke prepares the implied readers to engage with the pivotal events of this narrative by highlighting the

21. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 68.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 70.

24. McKeever, "Sacred Space and Discursive Field: The Narrative Function of the Temple in Luke-Acts," 56.

25. Darrell L. Bock, "Luke 1:1-9:50," *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 80.

26. Ibid.

27. Talley, "A Narrative-Critical Interpretation of Allusions to Abraham in the Lukan Infancy Narrative," 61.

sacred setting, the presence of God's messenger, and the priest selected by God.

D: Announcement of "Good News" (vv. 13-17; cf. v. 19)

Luke's decision to make the angel the first speaker in his Gospel is noteworthy. Being the divine messenger, the angel initiates the declaration of God's intended actions, suggesting that "God begins to move onto the center stage."[28] After reassuring Zechariah not to be afraid, the angel proceeds to announce the good news that his prayer has been answered and a son will be granted to him and his wife. The succeeding verse of the angel's announcement features a cluster of terms that convey the theme of joy (χαρά; ἀγαλλίασις; χαίρω; v. 14), as the angel foresees what Zechariah and Elizabeth will experience when God's promise of an offspring begins to be fulfilled. The angel conveys a dual sense of joy.[29] On one level, the birth of John will bring joy and gladness (χαρά; ἀγαλλίασις) to his aging parents. On another level, many will rejoice (χαίρω) because John will participate in the restoration of an entire people.

Χαρά (χαίρω) and ἀγαλλίασις appear as a pair in LXX to celebrate God's saving acts (Ps. 125:2; Ps. 95:12; Hab. 3:18). The use of "χαρά and ἀγαλλίασις" in Psalm 125 captures the jubilant joy felt by the Israelites at the end of their long exile in Babylon. Similarly, "χαίρω and ἀγαλλιάω" depict the joyful response of all creation as God restores harmony and fertility to the world in Psalm 95. Hab. 3:18 strikes a different note as the people continue to exult in God, using joyous language (ἀγαλλιάω; χαίρω) even amidst impoverished circumstances.

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28. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56," 89.

29. Kindalee Pfremmer De Long, "Surprised by God: Praise Responses in the Narrative of Luke – Acts," *Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, vol. 166 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 139.

This multifaceted portrayal of joy, encompassing both celebratory expressions of God's redemptive work and a steadfast posture of rejoicing even amidst trial and suffering, provides an important context for understanding Luke's use of the language of joy. All this joy has eschatological implications. This eschatological joy is further proved in the second half of verse 14, where the rejoicing has a corporate dimension. The narrative explicitly portrays the needs and obstacles faced by Zechariah and Elizabeth, while Luke, at the same time, alludes to the needs and challenges confronting Israel.[30] The announcement of John's birth intertwines these two narrative threads: God's answer to the petition of a faithful servant and the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. At this moment, the divine plan begins to unfold, signaling the dawning of a new era, full of hope and joy, as God acts to redeem his people. The joy proclaimed in verse 14b signals the shift from the needs of the parents to the needs of the people praying outside the sanctuary.[31]

The eschatological atmosphere is intensified when the angel explains the reasons for the joyful announcement of John's birth.[32] The angel gives a five-fold preview of the character and purpose of John's life.[33] First, John will be great in the sight of God (v. 15a). John's future mission is God-oriented (ἐνώπιον τοῦ Κυρίου), evident in the twofold reference to God. Second, John will have a special consecration to God (v. 15b). Complete abstinence from wine and other strong drinks echoes the angelic announcement of the birth of Samson (Judg. 13:3-6).[34] Third,

30. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 73.

31. Ibid., 74.

32. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56," 92.

33. John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*. New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 30-31.

34. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 75.

John will be filled with the Holy Spirit while he is still in the womb. This is quite unprecedented (v. 15c). There is a widespread tradition in Second Temple Judaism that the prophetic spirit has been withdrawn from Israel since the destruction of the first temple, but will be poured out upon the restored Israel at the end of the age (cf. Joel 2:28-32).[35] Therefore, the mention of the Holy Spirit in the story of John underscores the divine purpose and heightens the sense of eschatological expectation in the narrative. Fourth, he will prepare people fit for the Lord, turning them back to God and God's way (vv. 16; 17b). Fifth, John will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah (v. 17a). The wording of this verse is similar to Mal. 3:1, 24-25, which contains a promise of the coming of Elijah before the end-time.[36] A parallelism between the end-time ministry of Elijah and the reforming ministry of John is easily detected.[37] The repeated references to God and the heavily eschatological emphasis indicate that God is actively working to bring an end to the time of anticipation. "The promise is at the dawn of its fulfillment."[38]

C`: Zechariah's Objection and Angel's Response (vv. 18-20)

The narrative unfolds in a manner consistent with other ancient, divinely directed-accounts. The implied readers are expected to have rejoiced at the good news of conception and

35. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56", 93.

36. Ian Peter Pells, "How Far If at All Do the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke Set the Agenda for the Rest of Their Gospels and Do Those Agendas Reflect Common Matters of Concern?" (MA Thesis, University of Exeter, 2012), 80. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/how-far-if-at-all-do-infancy-narratives-gospels/docview/1651907696/se-2 (accessed June 30, 2024).

37. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50,* 80.

38. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, 86.

are ready to witness its fulfillment with Zechariah and the whole assembly. However, in verse 18, Luke shifts the story in a markedly different direction by "introducing a human touch into God's drama."[39]

Zechariah responds to the angel's annunciation with the very words κατὰ τί γνώσομαι ("how shall I know this?" v. 18) that Abraham used in Gen 15:8, similarly on the grounds of his and his wife's advanced age.[40] Scholars agree that Zechariah must have the Abrahamic story in mind as Luke has him utter the very word of his predecessor Abraham.[41] As a devout priest who knew the history of his people, Zechariah must also be familiar with other remarkable examples of God blessing barren women with significant sons: Sarah conceiving Isaac, Rachel conceiving Joseph, the wife of Manoah bearing Samson, and Hannah bearing Samuel.[42] Besides, the angel's statement (v. 13) that Zechariah's prayer was heard implies that Zechariah has been praying for a son. However, Zechariah's response indicates that he is not petitioning for a personal need at that moment. Rather, as prayers for national salvation are commonly offered during the evening ritual, he is likely interceding for the arrival of the messiah and the era of salvation.[43] Zechariah surpassed the age of childbearing as well as the age of enthusiastic expectation that such a miracle would happen to him. As Talley observes, Luke presents an ironic situation in which the devout and faithful priest, who bestowed divine

39. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56," 99.

40. Talley, "A Narrative-Critical Interpretation of Allusions to Abraham in the Lukan Infancy Narrative," 66.

41. De Long, *Surprised by God*, 175.

42. Robert H. Stein, "Luke," *New American Commentary*, vol. 24 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 46.

43. Howard, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 56.

blessings upon others, did not himself display the expectation that God would answer his own prayers.[44]

At this juncture, the angel discloses his identity and credentials as Angel Gabriel, who appeared only in the book of Daniel in the OT (Dan. 8:16; 9:21).[45] Gabriel's role is linked to eschatological events, as he is the messenger who delivered the prophecy of the seventy weeks. (Dan. 8:15-16; 9:21).[46] Additionally, Luke intends the readers to see a parallelism between Gabriel's appearance to Daniel and his appearance to Zechariah.[47] In both appearances (Lk 1:10-11; Dan. 9:20-21), Gabriel comes at the time of liturgical prayer to a figure who has been praying in distress.[48]

The εὐαγγελίζω (announce good news) modified by the plural ταῦτα suggests that the entirety of the angelic message (vv. 13-17) is in view, indicating that the birth of John the Baptist is part of the good news being announced.[49]

Because of Zechariah's doubt, which is stated explicitly by the angel (1:20b), Zechariah is struck dumb. Luke employs a dual description of Zechariah as "speechless" and "unable to speak" to accentuate Gabriel's credentials as a trustworthy divine messenger.[50] The implied readers are supposed to witness the initial realization of God's proclamation in the

44. Talley, "A Narrative-Critical Interpretation of Allusions to Abraham in the Lukan Infancy Narrative," 62.

45. Raymond E. Brown, "The Annunciation to Zechariah, the Birth of the Baptist, and the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:5-25, 57-80)," *Worship* 62.6 (1988): 485.

46. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 92.

47. Brown, "The Annunciation to Zechariah," 485.

48. Ibid.

49. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56," 102.

50. Talley, "A Narrative-Critical Interpretation of Allusions to Abraham in the Lukan Infancy Narrative," 67.

verse that follows (v. 22). The sign serves not only a punitive purpose but also an educational function, as this is how Zechariah will come to "know" (γνώσομαι Lk 1:18; γνῶσιν Lk 1:77) the truth of the angel's announcement.[51] Furthermore, the angel's claim that the words will be fulfilled (πληρόω) in due time conveys a sense of orderly (καθεξῆς cf. Lk 1:3) progression under the control of God, which is a central theme that Luke aims to establish through his narrative.[52]

B`: People, Sanctuary, Service (vv. 21-23)

Verses 21-23 parallel verses 8-10 in the chiastic structure. In verses 8-10, the people who are praying outside the temple serve as the backdrop for the annunciation, while in verses 21-23, the same people are not only the recipients of the joyful news but also witnesses of the initial fulfillment of the heavenly messenger's proclamation.[53] Dumbstruck, Zechariah cannot bless the people who are left to themselves to interpret the sign of the silent Zechariah.

Luke ends the first part of the story by describing how Zechariah finishes his duty and returns home. Luke slows down the pace of his narrative, granting the characters and readers time to comprehend and appreciate this concealed joyful message.[54] Zechariah, the priest, and the people must learn to be patient and reflect on God's unpredictable ways of fulfilling his promises.[55]

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51. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56," 102.

52. Ibid., 103.

53. Ibid., 106.

54. Scott F. Spencer, "Luke," *Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 48.

55. Ibid.

A`: Pregnant Elizabeth Offers Faithful Praise (vv. 24-25)

Luke reports Elizabeth's conception, fulfilling the initial promise of Gabriel. She hides herself for five months. The narrative does not explain Elizabeth's decision to withdraw from public view, yet this detail accounts for Mary's unawareness of Elizabeth's conception mentioned in 1:36.[56] Although no vocabulary of joy appears in this section, the joyful atmosphere radiates from Elizabeth's reaction to her conception, "So has the Lord done for me ...to take away my disgrace..." (v 25). The joyful Elizabeth correctly interprets the miraculous nature of her conception as the gracious act of God. The dual use of the first-person singular pronoun (μοι) in her concise statement suggests that she perceives her conception solely as a personal and private matter to rejoice about, and has not yet fully grasped the broader significance of the divine act.[57] Besides, Elizabeth's response echoes that of Rachel who found herself in a similar situation, "God has removed my disgrace" (Gen 30:23).[58] In connection with Elizabeth's five-month seclusion, Bosetti insightfully points out, "When God speaks it is right that one keep silent (Zechariah remained mute); when God works marvels it is not right to lose oneself in chatter, but to immerse oneself in religious silence. And this scene ends as it had begun in Lk 1:8: "before God" (ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ).[59]

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56. Stein, *Luke*, 78.

57. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56," 109.

58. Elisabeth Ann Johnson, "Barrenness, Birth, and Biblical Allusions in Luke 1–2" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000), 108. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/barrenness-birth-biblical-allusions-luke-1-2/docview/304632822/se-2 (accessed June 30, 2024).

59. Elena Bosetti, *Luke: The Song of God's Mercy*, trans. Julia Mary Darrenkamp, FSP (USA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006),19.

Characterization

Zechariah

At the beginning of the narrative, Zechariah is introduced with his wife Elizabeth and characterized as a pious and law-abiding couple before God (1:5-6). Despite their childlessness, which by no means is a punishment, Zechariah must be praying and enduring significant suffering due to this reality. Thus, he struggles to believe that God will still answer his petition after a prolonged and agonizing wait. Even when the angel announces the birth of his son, Zechariah displays skepticism by mentioning their advanced age as an obstacle. It appears that, in their younger years, Zechariah maintained trust in God's power to overcome his wife's barrenness. As the days pass, nothing changes except Zechariah's enthusiasm and trust in God. Although he still faithfully carries out his priestly duties, the years of waiting for the "unanswered petition" have seemingly obscured his perception of God as compassionate, relational, and powerful. Though he still remembers those miraculous interventions of God towards his ancestors, they seem to be just stories that happened a long time ago. He is waiting, but has forgotten what he is waiting for. As years of waiting in vain pass, his sense of joy seems to leave him.

During this moment of absence of joy, Luke encourages the readers to pause and reflect alongside the silent Zechariah, contemplating God's unexpected plan. The narrative prompts the readers to consider the following: if a devout and faithful priest struggles to believe in God's remarkable deeds, who else can trust in divine providence? Will Zechariah's period of solitude lead to a transformation in his understanding and faith?

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is introduced alongside her husband as a descendant of a priestly family. Together with her husband, she is a

living example of what it means to be righteous before God. However, she suffers from barrenness until she miraculously conceives a son at her advanced age. Significantly, there is no mention of her complaint about this condition. Rather, the first words she utters are words of praise, demonstrating that her long suffering from barrenness has not deprived her of the ability to recognize and celebrate God's providential action. Elizabeth's response is a stark contrast to Zechariah's initial skepticism. Her praise signifies that she understands her conception as a divine gift bestowed in God's perfect timing, not as a consequence of her own righteousness or piety, but solely because of the graciousness of God. She not only praises God immediately but also spends five months more contemplating this mystery. Bosetti observes, "Elizabeth retires from public view to remain totally beneath the gaze of God, who has decided to rest the divine gaze upon her."[60] As such, Elizabeth emerges as the first grateful and joyful recipient of God's grace in this Gospel. However, her understanding remains incomplete, as the eschatological significance of John's role has not been revealed to her yet. Consequently, her joy, though profound, is not yet fully realized, and she retains the capacity for even deeper celebration of God's providential work.

The Rhetorical Device of Intertextuality

The most predominant rhetorical device used in this section is allusion. John Drury points out that in this section, "septuagintal words and phrases are as thick on the ground as autumn leaves."[61] Luke draws upon a range of OT language and imageries, particularly how the first two characters recall

60. Ibid.

61. John Drury, *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel: A Study in Early Christian Historiography* (USA: John Knox Press, 1977), 49.

biblical patterns concerning previously barren women conceiving remarkable sons. Through these allusions, Luke takes the readers back to Israel's history, even to the very beginning: the Abrahamic story.[62] Green makes a similar observation, "Luke is not introducing a new story, but continuing an old one, as if the real 'beginning' were the Septuagint."[63] Luke intends to make his readers aware that the same God is at work in behalf of his people in the past and in his own day.[64] Luke references the Book of the Prophet Malachi, which is the final book of the Hebrew Scriptures according to the Septuagint canon.[65] Significantly, the last two verses of Malachi (3:23-24), especially the final one, appear nearly verbatim in Luke 1:17, suggesting that Luke consciously writes a sequel to the narrative of God's story.

Evaluative Point of View

Luke's narrative begins by situating the story within the framework of Israel's salvation history, with God as the central protagonist. Moreover, Luke evaluates all events from the perspective of the divine, as evidenced by his frequent use of phrases like "in the sight of God" or "before God" (ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ, vv. 6, 8; ἐνώπιον τοῦ Κυρίου, vv. 15, 17, 19). The righteousness of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the greatness of John, and the credibility of Angel Gabriel are measured according to God's evaluative point of view. Furthermore, the messenger of God,

62. Jean Noël Aletti, "Unbelief and faith in Luke 1:5-25: Why does Luke's account begin with unbelief?" *Kanien* 1.1 (2013): 15.

63. Green, "The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1–2," 66.

64. Andrew E. Ar*terbury, "Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary,"* Reading the New Testament 2nd Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2019), 23.

65. Richard Rohr, *The Good News according to Luke: Spiritual Reflections* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 61.

Angel Gabriel, is made the first speaker, announcing God's plan for his people. This implies that God takes the initiative to act in Luke's narrative, and then everything unfolds based on God's agenda. In Talley's words, "Luke is reminding the reader that the narrative is God's story."[66]

God's solution to the sterility of Zechariah and Elizabeth is interwoven with the broader covenantal relationship between God and his people.[67] Luke gives no hint about Israel's expectation and hopelessness, but the intertwined threads enable the readers to envision a people who suffered from the long and disappointing wait, even to the point of lacking hope of receiving an affirmative answer to their prayers. Through this, the implied readers are made aware that the people waiting outside the temple symbolize God's people eagerly anticipating the fulfillment of the divine promises. Ultimately, God answers the desires of his people.

The Theme of Joy

The best news in this episode is that God takes the initiative to bring joy to his people. Luke locates most of the action in the temple, where God is most present. In this sacred place, God delegates his messenger to announce the birth of John. The announcement is not only good news for his elderly parents but also signifies the dawn of eschatological fulfillment. "John represents a bridge between promise and fulfillment."[68] In this sense, this joy is intimately related to the fulfillment of God's promise. God is reaching out to his people in the present in a

66. Talley, "A Narrative-Critical Interpretation of Allusions to Abraham in the Lukan Infancy Narrative," 65.

67. Ibid.

68. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 86.

manner that parallels the way he interacted with his people historically.[69]

Second, the same faithful God is still at work, remembering his covenant with his people and answering their prayers. Luke imbues the entire narrative with the style and ambiance of the OT by frequently alluding to biblical images and expressions. As the readers engage with this episode, those joyful stories made possible by God's gracious intervention must echo in their minds. After years of prayers and waiting, the barren and nearly distressed mothers were granted unexpected and remarkable sons. All the promises came to pass according to the divine agenda. In Darrell Bock's words, "God's answers sometimes come at a surprising time, in a surprising place, and in a surprising way."[70]

Most importantly, human doubt cannot thwart God's plan to bring his people joy.[71] Zechariah's lack of faith postpones the joyful moments predicted by Gabriel. A period of silence temporarily replaces joy. Zechariah needed to spend time contemplating the divine salvation, which would equip him for an appropriate response when the promise would have been fulfilled. It was a silent interval for Zechariah to cultivate trust in God.

In summary, this joy stems from a faithful God who proactively brings it to his people. Nothing can hinder the divine will from unfolding. All those involved in this divine mystery are summoned to ponder, to engage with this merciful God, and then to rejoice and extol God.

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69. Chung, "The Annunciation Narratives in Luke 1:5-56," 108.

70. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 83.

71. Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1–2*, *JSNT Supplement Series* 88 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 49.

PARACONSISTENT LOGIC AND THE METAPHYSICS OF THE INCARNATION:
A DEFENSE OF Jc BEALL'S CONTRADICTORY CHRISTOLOGY[1]

Vincent Ray M. Daut

Introduction

The metaphysics of the Incarnation lies at the core of our Christian faith, presenting a profound and enduring problem concerning the identity of Christ, a problem that has engaged theologians and philosophers for centuries.

> Our Lord Jesus Christ is...one and the same Son, the self-same perfect in Godhead, the self-same perfect in humanity; truly God and truly man...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same son and only-begotten God, The Word, Lord, Jesus Christ. - *Chalcedon 451*

Since the first articulation of the Christological Declaration of the Council of Chalcedon, a number of theological attempts have been made to resolve the apparent contradiction implicit

1. This article is based on research originally developed as part of my thesis. I extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Jc Beall (University of Notre Dame, USA) for his insightful evaluation and constructive feedback on the original manuscript, which significantly contributed to the refinement of this work.

in its formulation. The declaration that Christ is both truly human and truly divine articulates, with clarity and precision, a doctrinal commitment that raises significant metaphysical questions: namely, how two distinct natures, divine and human, can subsist in a single person of Christ without compromising the integrity of each nature.

Analytic theology, emerging as a recent intellectual development, endeavors to resolve the Christological dilemma through the precise argumentative methods and conceptual frameworks of analytic philosophy. Jc Beall, a philosopher at the University of Notre Dame, is actively engaged in the project of Analytic theology, contributing to its ongoing theological discourse. In his book "The Contradictory Christ," Beall articulates his principal argument: "Christ is a contradictory being by virtue of being both human and divine as declared by the Council of Chalcedon." He insists that the Chalcedonian formula about Christ contains and expresses a real contradiction,[2] and it is a contradiction because the way it is formulated leads to a theological and logical tension. This paper explores Beall's work on contradictory Christology, examining how his ideas challenge traditional views of Christ's identity and how we should approach the problem of the Incarnation. His approach offers a new yet controversial perspective by integrating paraconsistent logic with Christology, particularly in how his application of paraconsistent logic leads to a Christology that embraces the contradictions inherent in the belief that Christ is both fully divine and fully human. The discussion also includes some key arguments in support of Beall's position, followed by a critical evaluation of some of the main objections it faces.

2. Beall distinguishes paradox from contradiction. Paradoxes, on common usage, are apparent contradictions, i.e., propositions that appear to entail contradictions. A contradiction, on the other hand, is a contradiction regardless of how it appears to us.

Defining the Core Theological Problem

In his article "A neglected *QUA* solution to the fundamental problem of Christology", Beall quoted Richard Cross:

> [T]he fundamental philosophical problem specific to the doctrine is this: how is it that one and the same thing could be both divine (and thus, on the face of it, necessary, and necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, immutable, impassible, and impeccable) and human (and thus, on the face of it, have the complements of all these properties).[3]

Beall argues that "the contradiction of Christ, on the proposed Christology, is not there because the Conciliar-text authors were sloppy; it is there because Christ's foundational role in Christianity requires something contradictory – and thereby something extraordinary, unique, and awesome."[4] It is not something that was forced by the council, but it was what Christ had revealed to them. At the outset, I think, it is important to note that Beall does not suggest nor insist that contradictory Christology is the true and best theory of the incarnation. For him, to insist that contradictory Christology is the true Christology is a difficult task and is therefore too difficult to prove. What he has in mind is to defend the viability of contradictory Christology and to present some reasons why it deserves our philosophical and theological attention. In pursuing this aim, Beall also examines the role of logic in theology and insists that the principle of *ex falso quodlibet* (explosion principle) is a philosophically open question. He insists that it is time to confront directly this Christological contradiction that has baffled theologians and philosophers

3. Jc Beall & Jared Henderson, "A Neglected Qua Solution to the Fundamental Problem of Christology." *Faith and Philosophy*, No. 36 (2019): pg. 157.

4. Jc Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," in *Journal of Analytic Theology*, Vol. 7 (June 2019): pg. 416.

for centuries and to examine it from a critical perspective, and not to dismiss it without understanding its critical and salient points.

The main problem that Beall intends to address is the apparent contradiction of Christ (which he believes to be a true contradiction), i.e., Christ being both truly human and divine at the same time. Here is the simple illustration of the problem as identified by Beall:

1. Christ is immutable (by virtue of his divine nature).
2. Christ is mutable (by virtue of his human nature).
3. Therefore, Christ is both mutable and not mutable (via logic).[5]

From this, we can infer other attributes of Christ that are appropriate to him being human and being divine by virtue of *communicatio idiomatum*:[6]

> Something that has (or exemplifies) a nature N has whatever properties are entailed by having nature N.[7]
>
> Thus,
>
> Christ has a divine nature (entailing immutability) and independently and without diminishment also has a human nature (entailing mutability).

The history of Christology could be seen as an ongoing attempt to avoid the Christological contradiction implicit in the Chalcedonian declaration, since it did not conform to the prevailing view of logic at the time it was originally formulated.

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5. Ibid., pg. 401.

6. Communication of Idioms is the way how we attribute divine and human properties to Christ who is both human and divine.

7. As pointed by Beall, this is a default metaphysical (or extra-theological) principle about the relation between natures and beings that have them.

Beall argues that what prevented them from accepting a logically contradictory Christology was their intellectual bias, which was built on an incorrect view of logic itself.[8] Thus, for him, logic should be viewed the right way so that one can proceed to construct the content of one's theory. Beall asserts that we should pay attention to the role of logic in our theological theories because it can affect the way we formulate them. Logic serves as the common foundation of all theories across all disciplines. It is the bedrock of all theories. Thus, when we add foundational premises to our theory about God, we should build these premises on the consequence relations dictated by the logic most appropriate to the theory.

The Role of Logic in Theology: Jc Beall's Interpretation

For Beall, logic is the basement-level closure/consequence relation involved in all true theories. It is the very foundation of all theories, not just of scientific and philosophical theories, but of theological theories as well. Beall says,

> Christian theology is a theory of God, just as macro physics is a theory of the macro-physical world and just as mathematical theories are theories of their respective mathematical phenomena (numbers, categories, sets, whathaveyou). (...) [New paragraph] When theorists aim to construct a true theory, they aim to construct as complete a theory as possible. In particular, the resulting theory should not only contain the initial thrown-in truths (e.g., that God is triune, that Christ has two natures, etc.); the theory should also contain whatever follows from the truths in the theory; it should contain all of the consequences of the theory's claims. (p. 22)

8. See Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 402.

He points out that the task of a theorist is "to construct a set of truths about the target phenomenon and close that set of truths under a consequence relation that is the right relation to 'complete' the true theory of the given phenomenon."[9] A theory is said to be complete if it does not only contain thrown-in truths about the target phenomenon (e.g., Christ has two natures or that Christ is the Second Person in the Trinity), but also what one can infer from the starting set of claims. Both of these constitute a complete theory. For Beall, any theory has a two-fold task: (1) gather the truths about the target phenomenon, and (2) construct the right closure relation to 'complete' the true theory – to give as full or as complete a true theory as possible.[10] This suggests that when the target phenomenon is identified and defined, we gather all the truths about this phenomenon and try to give a complete account of it by providing a right closure relation. Beall claims that, like all other sciences, theology should also be as complete as possible. That is the target. Therefore, whatever truths we can claim about Christ, these truths must contain all the possible consequences we can infer from the given set of claims about him by virtue of the consequence relation, and this consequence relation is fundamental in all theories. Beall adds,

> Without a consequence (closure) relation, our theories remain inadequate; they fail to contain truths that are entailed by the given set of truths. Inasmuch as theorists, and theologians in particular, aim to give as complete a theory of the target phenomenon as possible, the reliance on a consequence relation for our theory is required. (p. 24)

9. Ibid., pg. 404.

10. See Jc Beall, "The Simple Argument for Subclassical Logic," *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 28, Issue 1 (October 2018): pg. 30-54.

This prompts the following question: "What have such theory-specific consequence relations to do with logic's role in theories?" or, in other words, "What is the role of logic in any scientific and systematic theory?" Beall says,

> Logic is a very special consequence (entailment, closure) relation. Logic is the common core of all (closed) theories; it is at the bottom of all of the (extra-logical, theory-specific) consequence relations of our true theories. (...) Logic itself does not say anything peculiar about knowledge claims, arithmetical claims, modal claims, or theological claims; logic ignores the specific subject matter of those sorts of claims and treats them as it treats claims about any subject matter whatsoever. (p. 24)

Beall insists that the role of logic in all systematic theories is foundational and universal – the bedrock upon which all theories are built, grounded in sound reasoning. Logic is also basically topic-neutral, and it does not add further information to the target theory but merely determines whether the theory is valid. It treats all claims with the same logical consideration, despite whatever is contained in the claim in question (e.g., a dog is an animal or witches are true). Logic concerns itself with the "form" of a sentence, not its content. As pointed out by Beall, "logic is formal in that its consequence relation holds only in virtue of the given logical forms."[11] A sentence may take one of the following forms:

(1) Atomic sentences: any sentence that is free of logical vocabulary.

(2) Truth claims (nullations): any sentence of the form it is true that . . .

11. See Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 406.

(3) Falsity claims (negations): any sentence of the form it is false that . . .

(4) Conjunctions: any sentence of the given (logical-conjunction) form, namely, . . . and . . . where 'and' is a logical conjunction.

(5) Disjunctions: any sentence of the given (logical-disjunction) form, namely, . . . or . . . where 'or' is logical disjunction.[12]

Logic recognizes only a sentence that fits into one or more of its recognized logical forms. It has nothing to say about sentences that fall outside these forms, at least within the classical account of logic. However, Beall argues that to couch all sentences into just two logical possibilities - truth and falsity - oversimplifies the complexity of both language and reality. He insists that there are actually four logical possibilities: truth, falsity, gappy, and glut, which better capture the nuances of how we understand the world. If a theorist wants to take a full analysis of the target phenomenon, the space for all logical possibilities should be left open. We should not be confined to just two logical possibilities, especially if the target phenomenon pushes us to go beyond the classical account. Beall argues:

> Logic is involved in all consequence relations for our true theories, including our theory of God (i.e., our theology). Logic achieves this universal role – the foundation of all entailment (or closure) relations on our true theories – in virtue of recognizing the widest space of possibilities. It's not that 'anything goes' by logic's lights, but a vast array of otherwise very strange possibilities is recognized by logic.[13]

12. Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christ* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), pg. 25.

13. See Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 407.

He insists that, in constructing a true and complete theory, we must go beyond merely limiting our logical possibilities to the binary dichotomy of true and false. It is true that "logic is a matter of preservation of truth in all cases,"[14] but this is not all there is to it. The chief task of logic, after all, is to account for all consequences and to see if each consequence is valid.

First-Degree Entailment: Beall's Target Theory of Logic

To start, I think it is important to underscore that in the standard account of logic, the semantic value of a sentence depends on what is happening at the atomic level. This means that "the semantic value of a sentence is a function of the semantic value of the atomic sentences."[15][16] An atomic sentence gets a semantic value by virtue of denotation, i.e., if the subject term corresponds to an extra-linguistic object and the predicate term says something true about the subject term, then the given sentence is said to be true, and vice versa. The truth and falsity conditions for atomic sentences are as follows:

- Truth in a model: Atomic Gη is true-in-a-model iff $\delta(\eta)$ is in G+.
- Falsity in a model: Atomic Gη is false-in-a-model iff $\delta(\eta)$ is in G–.[17]

Note: η is the subject of the given sentence, G is the predicate of the given sentence, and it can be either true or false (G+ or G—), and δ is the denotation function.

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14. Jc Beall and Greg Restall, "Logical Pluralism", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. Vol 78, No. 4 (December 2000) pg. 477.

15. In logic, atomic sentences are those that are either true or false and cannot be broken down into simpler sentences.

16. See Jc Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 410.

17. See Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christology*, pg. 31.

This raises the following question: what constraints logic imposes on the interpretations of the predicates? There are two ways: exhaustion and exclusion.

- Exhaustion: every sentence is either true or false.
- Exclusion: no sentence is both true and false.

The classical account of logic demands both exhaustion and exclusion, and therefore does not allow gaps and gluts (gap refers to a statement that is neither true nor false, and glut refers to a statement that is both true and false simultaneously). First-Degree Entailment (FDE), on the other hand, allows for both gaps and gluts. FDE is a paraconsistent logic that rejects the principle of explosion and focuses on relevant implication. It does not limit itself only within the boundaries of the principle of bivalence but instead widens the logical space and allows a sentence to be either true, false, gappy, or glutty. As mentioned, unlike classical logic (which demands both exhaustion and exclusion) and the logic of paradox (which requires exhaustion, but not exclusion), FDE allows for both gluts and gaps within its framework without necessarily leading to logical explosion. FDE does not impose exhaustion nor exclusion on the predicates but expands the logical space and goes beyond the limited confines of the classical account.

FDE is a logic that can be seen as the result of evaluating formulas and arguments built with connectives {~, ∧, ∨, →}[18] according to the following assignments, where A and B stand for any formula:

1. ~A is true iff A is false; ~A is false iff A is true;

18. These are the basic logical operators: negation (~), conjunction (∧), disjunction (∨), and conditional (→). These operators function as connectors between propositions, resulting in a more complex proposition that in turn acquires a truth value.

2. A ^ B is true iff A is true and B is true; A ^ B is false iff A is false or B is false;
3. A v B is true iff A is true or B is true; A v B is false iff A is false and B is false;
4. A → B is true iff A is false or B is true; A → B is false iff A is true and B is false.[19]

Consider the following:

A: "It is raining."

B: "The streets are wet."

In FDE:

1. A → B: If it is raining, then the streets are wet.
2. ~A → ~B: If it is not raining, then the streets are not wet.
3. A ^ ~A → ~B: If it is both raining and not raining, then the streets are not wet.

With this, the following then may be given as truth and falsity conditions for molecular sentences:

- Nullations: +A is at least true in model m iff A is at least true in model m.
- Nullations: +A is at least false in model m iff A is at least false in model m.
- Negations: ~A is at least true in model m iff A is at least false in model m.
- Negations: ~A is at least false in model m iff A is at least true in model m.

19. Luis Estrada-Gonzalez, "The Logical Bases of Contradictory Christology: Comments on The Contradictory Christ," Ch. 2, *Manuscritto*, (July 2021) https://doi.org/10.1590/0100- 6045.2021. V44N4.LG (accessed November 22, 2024).

- Disjunctions: A v B is at least true in model m iff either A is at least true in m or B is at least true in m.
- Disjunctions: A v B is at least false in model m iff both A is at least false in m or B is at least false in m.
- Conjunctions: A ^ B is at least true in model m iff both A is at least true in m and B is at least true in m.
- Conjunctions: A ^ B is at least false in model m iff either A is at least true in m and B is at least true in m.[20]

With this, what are the invalid argument forms in FDE that are relevant to Beall's project? Beall identifies two:

1. A ^ ~A ⊭ B (Therefore, by logic's light, a theory can still contain a contradiction without entailing all sentences at all).
2. B⊭ A v ~A (Therefore, not all logical systems, including FDE, do not require the law of excluded middle by logic's light).

Now, we see why accepting contradictions does not necessarily lead to a logical explosion. As is always argued by the proponents of paraconsistent logic, it is too much to conclude that if one accepts a contradiction, one is necessarily forced to believe in everything. Also, it is important to highlight that the same truth and falsity conditions in the classical account are adopted in FDE. There are no logical alterations in terms of meanings and signification; the difference is that in FDE, the space of logical possibilities is expanded.

So now, what makes FDE the right account of logic *vis-à-vis* the classical candidate? According to Beall, FDE has at least three salient virtues:

20. See Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christology*, pg. 33.

1. The first virtue is that the familiar truth and falsity conditions are maintained, as illustrated above. "What is important to emphasize (...) is that these truth and falsity conditions are precisely the same conditions used in the standard classical-logic account."
2. A second virtue is that the resulting logic is clearly topic-neutral by not taking a stand on whether gappy or glutty atomic sentences are ruled out.
3. A third virtue is most relevant to the principal project of a contradictory Christology: namely, that logic does not force unique, strange phenomena into the cramped confines of classical-logic possibilities. (p. 35)

With the following reasons, Beall endorses the Contradictory Christology, which views the tension between the human nature and divine nature as a genuine contradiction, and this contradiction does not necessarily undermine the coherence of our Christian faith.

Why accept the Contradictory Christology: The Seven Virtues

Beall identifies seven considerations that motivate Contradictory Christology over the many consistent accounts: (1) simplicity, (2) avoiding *ad hoc* changes in meaning, (3) metaphysical neutrality, (4) preserving the principal subject of Christology, (5) balancing "from above" and "from below," (6) preserving the mystery of hypostatic union, and (7) Christology and the obvious need for faith. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Beall does not suggest that contradictory Christology is the true and sufficiently complete Christology. This, for him, is impossible to demonstrate due to our epistemic limitations. What he intends to do is to present some substantial reasons why a contradictory Christological approach is worthy of our

theological and philosophical consideration. Let us briefly discuss the seven virtues as viewed by Beall.

Simplicity

Beall argues that what makes contradictory Christology attractive is its simplicity. It is simple because it only presents to us the simplest account of the apparent[21] contradiction of Christ, i.e., "exactly one person who is one divine person (with all properties thereby entailed) who is also one human person (with all properties thereby entailed)."[22] Let us be clear that Beall does not propose a Nestorian view of Christ. He argues that Christ is one human person because Christ is both a person and human. Likewise, Christ is one divine person because he is the same person who is also divine. Thus, this is not about two persons being united together to form one "hybrid" person, but that Christ is both a human and a divine person. Clearly, with such a claim about Christ, a contradiction is identified.

> Except when saddled with an incorrect account of logical consequence, the contradiction who is Christ is exactly what anyone would expect from taking the transcendence and boundlessness of the immutable and impeccable God and uniting – however mysteriously – with the immanent, bounded, mutable and peccable humanity with which we are so intimately familiar, uniting not in a way that in two different persons or a new hybrid 'divine-human' nature. . . (pg. 37).

However, Beall adds, it is this contradiction that makes Christianity distinct from other belief systems. It is this contradiction that saves our fallen humanity. Without this

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21. Beall argues that the simplest explanation of the apparent contradiction is that the appearance is genuine. He believes that the contradiction is real.

22. See Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christ* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), pg. 37.

contradiction, our human dignity would never be restored nor salvaged (see Aquinas' soteriological reasons of incarnation). There were too many attempts to resolve to maneuver this contradiction by theological machinations, but the heretics ended up overemphasizing one nature over the other. What this contradictory approach suggests is to accept the Christological contradiction as it is, the way it reveals itself to us. There is no need for further theological and linguistic manipulations just to get away with the contradiction. Beall insists that "[t]he mark of Christians is that via faith they accept contradiction; they believe that Christ is God incarnate, [one] divine person who is also [one] human person and who remains exactly [one] person."[23]

Avoiding ad hoc changes in meaning

One common attempt to avoid the contradiction is by changing or manipulating the meanings of some important technical terms used by early Christian theologians (terms like "divine" and "human") just to establish the consistency of their Christological accounts. Beall says:

> In the quest to consistentize Christ, a change-the-meaning strategy is common. One avenue along this route is to change the meaning of 'divine' and/or 'human,' perhaps rejecting the so-called classic-theism account of divinity or, in the other direction, the classic conception of humanity. A directly related strategy is to change the meaning – the standard usage – of the fundamental problem predicates such as 'mutable' and 'immutable' and so on.[24]

In his proposed contradictory Christology, the target divine and human predicates are not changed in terms of their

23. Ibid., pg. 38.

24. Ibid., pg. 38.

meaning and signification, and the logical vocabulary remains intact.[25] The theological terms, which are foundational in our understanding of Christ's identity and the incarnation, are not semantically manipulated. The terms like "divine," "human," "mutable," and "immutable" are understood and defined in the way they are originally and fundamentally articulated. If one might accuse his contradictory account of being another version of *ad hoc* maneuvering because it relies so much on a sub-classical account of logic and not on the standard account of logic, the accusation, Beall argues, is misplaced since all logical concepts and vocabulary are not changed or compromised. The way these logical concepts are used in Beall's contradictory account is the same as in the classical account. In his account, the standard truth and falsity conditions are defined the way they are defined in the classical account.

Metaphysical Neutrality

Another reason why, for Beall, we should accept contradictory Christology is that it is not metaphysically loaded, unlike the many sophisticated Christological accounts. In an interview, Beall argued that contradictory Christology does not depend on any complex metaphysical explanation to affirm the truth of Christ. Since the Church does not endorse an official Christian metaphysical system through which we can undergird the basic concepts of the metaphysics of incarnation, it is better to commit to a Christology that is not invested in any probationary metaphysical system. Beall argues that "one's solution to the fundamental [Christological] problem is better off than otherwise if it does not demand a particular metaphysics; rather, it is better off being neutral with respect

25. Ibid., pg. 39.

to whatever the ultimate true metaphysics of such matters happens to be."[26] He goes on to say,

> While philosophers and theologians hope to one day obtain the true metaphysics of 'persons,' of 'wills,' of 'natures,' and so on (and so on), the viability of Contradictory Christology, as I've advanced it, is not threatened by the outcome of metaphysical inquiry.[27]

Therefore, for Beall, a good Christological account is one that is not threatened or affected by whatever metaphysical framework, no matter how powerful or weak it is, philosophers may discover in the future. The way Beall formulates and endorses his Christological account is not dependent on any metaphysical framework; the terms that are used in his contradictory account are theologically and metaphysically neutral and not metaphysically loaded.

Preserving the principal subject of Christology

Another reason why Beall endorses contradictory Christology is that it preserves Christ as the core subject, just as the Council of Chalcedon described him, i.e., he is both human and divine at the same time, and he is whatever is properly entailed by having those properties. In this kind of Christological paradigm, Christ's properties as being both human and divine are maintained. Beall argues that "a Christology wherein Christ is the principal subject of Christ's properties is better than one wherein something that is not Christ is the principal subject of the key properties of Christ." There have been persistent attempts made to avoid this Christological contradiction, and theologians and other Christians have endorsed different images of Christ—such as Christ being the firstborn before creation or Christ being

26. Ibid., pg. 39.

27. Ibid., pg. 39.

adopted by the Father—that differ greatly from the way the early Christian community first encountered and understood him. These theological developments increasingly diverge from the initial encounter with Christ that shaped the early Church's understanding of him. As for Beall, the more we deny the contradictory identity of Christ, the more we move away from the original identity that was endorsed by the early councils. As much as the heretics wanted to formulate a consistent Christology, they strayed from their principal subject, who was Christ. Even the modern attempt to use QUA (according to) devices to avoid this contradiction has veered away from the principal subject, Christ. This *qua*-solution is endorsed and defended by Prof. Daniel Rubio[28] of the Toronto Metropolitan University. In brief, what this *qua* solution does is to "divide the predicates between the two natures, such that some predicates apply to the person in virtue of the divine nature, and some in virtue of the human nature."[29] This leads to the following premises:

1. Christ-*qua*-divine is impeccable.
2. Christ-*qua*-human is peccable.

The problem with this, as pointed out by Beall, is that it divides Christ according to his (1) divine nature and (2) human nature, and this suggests two separate entities: (1) according to his divine nature, and (2) according to his human nature. An important question then arises: "Why are we talking about these entities when the issue on the table is that Christ – the one and only Godman – is both impeccable and peccable?" Beall stubbornly insists that this Christological strategy only

28. See his Article "In defence of *qua*-Christology" published by Cambridge University Press.

29. Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pg. 192.

rejects the fact that Christ as one subsistent being is the bearer of the target properties of being human and divine. There is no need to use these methods to avoid the contradiction. This will only substitute Christ for a version altered by theological manipulations.

Balancing "from above" and "from below"

Another reason for accepting contradictory Christology is that it respects both the divinity and humanity of Christ. It defines both natures in the way they should be defined. Though this may lead to a contradiction, it does not prioritize one over the other just to maintain consistency. Though there is a struggle to hold the tension between Christ's humanity and divinity, Beall's proposal avoids distorting Christ. Oliver Crisp, a British theologian, makes a point that an imbalanced Christology that puts more emphasis on the divinity of Christ "falls prey to a distortion of Christ's genuine humanity, including Christ's genuine human experiences – the experiences as we, in our limited and peccable state, experience them." The same point is true when one puts more emphasis on the humanity of Christ. Therefore, any imbalanced view of Christology, either putting more emphasis on above or below, will lead to an incorrect understanding of the incarnation as advanced by the Chalcedonian fathers.

The Chalcedonian Christology, which is what we hold to be the true Christology, demands a balanced view of this divine-and-human tension. There have been a few attempts to hold this tension between divinity and humanity and to avoid the contradiction, but most of these attempts have prioritized either one of the two natures, which leads to an imbalanced view of Christology. Logically speaking, it is difficult and epistemologically incomprehensible to imagine that Jesus could be both perfect and imperfect at the same time, or both limited

and unlimited at the same time, or both powerful and powerless at the same time. Contradictory Christology maintains that these two are possible in Christ. It may be a contradictory claim, but not incoherent. The only way for Beall to balance the tension between these two completely different properties is to accept the contradiction.

Preserving the mystery of the hypostatic union

The mystery of the hypostatic union lies at the core of Christology. Beall argues that the problem is not about the unification of the two natures; after all, some theologians claim and maintain that the hypostatic union is consistent and not contradictory. However, the problem arises only when we attempt to elaborate on what is entailed by these two distinct natures, and the contradiction begins to emerge when we try to unite them in one person. But if the hypostatic union is said to be consistent, as most theologians claim, then where lies the mystery? If all the consistent Christological accounts have finally pinned down the contradictory problem, then is it fair to say that the hypostatic union is no longer a mystery? In Beall's contradictory account, the mystery of the hypostatic union is maintained. His Christological framework maintains that it is a mystery, not because Christ is contradictory, but that:

> [t]he mystery is rather one of implementation or mechanism: how the contradiction was pulled off. We have precise (largely mathematical) models of how to think about the contradiction, but these models are at best guides to the truths that follow (or don't follow) from Christ's contradictory being; they don't provide an explanation of how the actual contradiction was realized. How a contradiction is truly realized in a world that in most other respects is truly described by consistent theories remains mysterious at its core. (pg. 45)

Christology and the obvious need for faith

With the kind of Christological framework that the contradictory Christology offers, one is led to accept and believe the truth about Christ, the incarnate God, i.e., a contradiction. As pointed out by Beall, believing in the full truth requires believing in the contradictory truth of Christ, and this is one of the many distinct features of our faith. To say that Christ is fully human and fully divine is to hold the tension between "from above" and "from below." It is not that we should compromise one to make room for the other, but we maintain that both are true in Christ in every respect. Beall argues that it is in this tension that faith is required. This is obviously difficult to accept and understand because we are accustomed to a kind of logic that rules out contradictions, but Beall challenges his readers that what is required to accept the whole truth about Christ, which includes his contradictory identity, is faith. This faith, he adds, should be rooted in the incarnation: "faith that Christ is the transcendent God and that Christ is as human as you and me, peccable as we are, impeccable as God must be – and not because of some secretively non-standard semantics or the like."[30]However, Beall puts a caveat here. He does not talk about faith the way we talk about it in soteriology (faith that saves), after all, this is a huge and separate topic. By faith, he means that one has to believe in the contradiction contained in the Chalcedonian formula, which seems to evade our ordinary logical understanding and to be counterintuitive.

To conclude, for Beall, what is striking about Christological accounts that pursue consistency is that they have "produced a multitude of metaphysical gadgets and baroque edifices; but each such construction, while interesting and abstractly

30. See Beall, *Contradictory Christ*, pg. 46.

coherent, always carries the whiff of heresy."[31] They have the tendency to prioritize one nature over the other or focus too much on one property and forget the other. What is dangerous about these attempts is that they lead us further and further away from the simple and "gobsmacking," as Beall puts it, truth, i.e., the contradictory Christ. It is easy for non-Christians to see the contradictoriness of Christ, as one should expect when two contrary natures are united in one person. Now, Beall challenges us to shake off that "dogma" that endorses that all inconsistent theories should be rejected.

Objections to Contradictory Christology[32]

Like any other proposed theory, there are some objections and criticisms raised against Beall's proposal. There are philosophers and theologians, such as James Anderson, who attack his view and describe it as a major deviation from the classical account of logic and should be rejected. Beall painstakingly responds to each of these objections in his book and provides some reasons why these objections do not pose a threat to his contradictory account. For the sake of brevity and simplicity, we will consider only five major objections.

> **First Objection:** "Your Christology (and your theology, more generally) has it that various central Christian claims are both true and false, and therefore false! Your account of Christ is therefore false. Therefore, we should reject your account."[33]

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31. Ibid., pg. 47.

32. Some of these objections emerged from Beall's engagement with philosophers and theologians through interviews, debates, and personal correspondences. Thus, attributing each objection to a particular source proves difficult.

33. Ibid., pg. 49.

For Beall, to dismiss a theory that is both true and false by virtue of it being false is also to dismiss it by virtue of it being true as well. It is the goal of any true theory to reach the full truth and comprehensive understanding of the target phenomenon; this includes whatever it entails. If the evidence challenges our common understanding of what a true theory should be, it is theoretically justifiable to give much epistemic consideration and priority to the evidence rather than to our epistemic bias. As pointed out by Beall, most of our scientific theories deal with only "true" statements about the world because that is how they observe it (yet, with the progression of science, certain contradictions are affirmed, particularly in light of quantum indeterminacy). However, in the case of contradictory Christology, we deal with Christ, who is a completely different subject. Christ's role in the history of salvation is utterly unique because it demands contradicting qualities. This unique role is necessary for our salvation, as St. Athanasius beautifully puts it: "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." This contradictory appearance of Christ, as Dale Tuggy puts it, should be faced squarely by able and responsible theologians. Beall suggests that we should not be hasty in rejecting any theory that appears to be contradictory since our goal is to find the full truth, no matter how contradictory it is.

> **Second objection:** "Coherence is a necessary condition for truth, and a coherent Christology rules out Contradictory Christology since a true list of Christ's properties cannot contain contradictory pairs."[34]

This objection, as pointed out by Beall, rests on the principle that "true theories must 'hang together' in a way that avoids outright triviality, where triviality is the uncontroversially

34. Ibid., pg. 50.

absurd 'trivial theory' – namely, the theory containing all sentences in the language of the theory."[35] In logic, trivialism is the view that all contradictions are true, or that everything is true. Obviously, this is not the view that Beall endorses. Of course, not all contradictions are true, but some contradictions are not necessarily incoherent. Looking at the role of Christ being contradictory, most of our basic theological tenets make sense because of this contradictory affirmation. Beall and other paraconsistent logicians maintain that there are propositions that are contradictory and necessarily coherent.

> **Third Objection:** "The patristic writers who informed the conciliar documents that at least partially define target Christian theological doctrines (e.g., incarnation and trinity) were entirely unaware of suitable sub-classical accounts of logical consequence that make sense of gluts or contradictory theories generally. In turn, the conciliar fathers who wrote target doctrinal texts were obviously not thinking of such accounts of logical consequence, and hence were not thinking about or otherwise entertaining would-be true contradictions in theology. Hence, any contradictory Christian theology is either conspicuously detached from the intentions of conciliar writers or simply getting such intentions wrong. Either way, any would-be contradictory Christian theology should be rejected."[36]

Beall responds to this objection in four points:

(1) It is true that most patristic fathers were unaware of sub-classical accounts of logic, but it is not necessarily true that they were not advancing contradictory

35. Ibid., pg. 50.

36. Jc Beall, "Ten Objections to Contradictory Christology," in *Paradox and Contradictions in Theology*, ed. Jonathan Routledge (New York: Routledge, 2024), pg. 57.

accounts of theology. Basil Lourie, a professor at National Research University Higher School of Economics, argues that Byzantine patristics endorsed a kind of theology that is contradictory but without a full explicit account of logic on which it could be grounded. One notable figure that pushes for a paraconsistent account is Patriarch Eulogius of Alexandria (see the article "Theodore the Studite's Christology Against its Logical Background"). Beall points this out to insist that paraconsistency is not new to the early Christians. Even though Aristotelian dogma was regarded as the orthodox view of logic during the Chalcedonian era, there were still those who challenged it.

(2) Another reason for rejecting the above objection is that, though there was no explicit paraconsistent logical account during the patristic period, it is not clear that there was a clear, consistent, and non-contradictory account of Christology. After all, there is still an ongoing debate about how we should understand the concept of hypostatic union, and any attempt to give a consistent account always leads to a heretical declaration. Sarah Coakley, Cambridge, argues that the Chalcedonian formula has its own limitations. There are gaps within the formula, and one of these is its failure to provide a consistent and non-contradictory Christological account (see the article "What Chalcedon Solved and Did Not Solve").

(3) Another reason has to do with divine inspiration and the intention of the conciliar fathers. This divine inspiration is what affirms the "canonicity" of the written text in question. Beall argues that this divine inspiration may sometimes be at odds with the intention of the conciliar

fathers.[37] He further argues that a divinely inspired writer "may write something that she intends to be read one way, but the truth, divinely inspired as it is, goes against [her] intentions." Beall admits that there is no way we can establish that this really happened to the conciliar fathers, but still, this is possible. We have to remember that, though the conciliar fathers were very familiar with Aristotelian logic, and yet they still pushed for a kind of Christological view that seems to evade consistency.

(4) A final point to note is that the Chalcedonian declaration puzzled not only us as contemporary readers but also the very conciliar fathers who were believed to be divinely inspired. This is not because they want to sound complicated, but because they, too, are grappling with the reality that is revealed to them. It is, therefore, a result of hard thinking and reflection that leads them to apparently contradictory claims, Beall argues. It is easy for them to affirm only the humanity or the divinity of Christ, but they insist on affirming both. It is easy for them to affirm that Christ is the adopted son of the Father or that he is a demigod, but they still insist that Christ is truly God and truly human. They affirm all this even if this leads to a contradictory conclusion. As pointed out by Beall, this situation is so common among those who seek truth and are divinely inspired, i.e., "writing what is true without understanding exactly why or how it is true."

Fourth Objection: "Much of traditional monotheism, and especially Christian theology, is explicitly entwined with central mysteries. The Catholic Church,

37. Ibid., pg. 56.

> for example, maintains that trinitarian reality is a fundamental mystery. Such phenomena often appear to be contradictory, but they are thereby just 'paradoxes'—just *apparent contradictions*—and not actually contradictory (Anderson 2007). Accordingly, motivation for contradictory theology is entirely undermined when one accepts instead that target apparent contradictions are pointers towards divine mysteries, not towards actual divine contradiction."[38]

Beall highlights two important responses to this objection:

(1) If the theological contradiction is too strong, as it is in the case of Christ being both truly divine and truly human, why not accept that the subject in question is contradictory? As in any scientific process, if a contradictory claim is supported by evidence, as is required of all scientific claims, there is no compelling reason to reject its truth. Beall further adds that if one claims that all theological contradictions must be rejected by virtue of their being contradictory, then this needs a substantive argument to support the claim.

(2) Another point to respond to this objection is the following: "The existence of mystery and the appearance of contradiction are very different things, sometimes related, sometimes unrelated."[39] Beall argues that unless we can establish both are correlated "one-to-one," then the possibility that the apparent contradiction is just a "pointer" to non-contradictory mystery is subject to suspicion. Beall further adds that the existence of divine mystery does not undermine or diminish his contradictory account of Christology.

38. Ibid., pg. 60.

39. Ibid., pg. 60.

> **Fifth Objection**: "It looks like Contradictory Christology naturally generalizes to other parts of theology. In particular, doesn't the general proposal require that every apparent contradiction in theology be treated as contradictory – including, perhaps especially, the very familiar 'logical' puzzles involving God's omniscience, omnipotence (a too-heavy stone) and the like?"[40]

Beall responds to this objection with a resounding "no." While it is true that all other contradictory theological claims are open questions and logic leaves open such contradictions, it is still important to establish that these theological contradictions are ontologically and epistemologically motivated. As it is always emphasized by Beall, any contradictory claim needs to be supported by evidence. What Beall suggests is to consider each contradictory problem and examine it critically, and if this problem leads you to a resounding contradictory conclusion despite being guarded by theological skepticism, then there is no good reason to reject the conclusion. After all, we should adhere to the general principle that we should accept whatever conclusion we may come up with, despite our philosophical and theological prejudices.

Conclusion

Jc Beall's contradictory Christology offers us a new approach to the problem of the Incarnation. It is one of the most intriguing developments in contemporary Christology. Its bold claim has already sparked considerable criticism and brought forth important discussions among theologians. His insistence that we should reevaluate our understanding and view of logic, expanding it beyond the limits of the classical account, is both controversial and revolutionary. However,

40. See Beall, *Contradictory Christ*, pg. 111.

what many theologians find compelling in Beall's proposal is his emphasis on giving greater attention to the logical framework and entailment relations of our theological premises. This emphasis on the logical framework and entailment relations is essential to the pursuit of a true and complete theory about Christ, for it is at this point that the core intellectual labor is situated. As pointed out by Thomas McCall, professor of theology at Asbury University, "it is sometimes too easy to find theologians making claims about the 'implications' of some doctrinal proposal – either positively or negatively – without doing the hard work of seeing just what *is* implied or entailed."[41]

The paraconsistent logic endorsed by Beall continues to exert considerable impact on contemporary logical theory. It has captured the interest of philosophers and logicians, as well as theologians, in recent years. With the rise of analytic theology, the growing emphasis on clarity and precision in theological discourse has prompted the application of paraconsistent logic in theology, an approach initially endorsed by Beall. What, then, is the role of paraconsistent logic in theology, and how does it contribute to theological inquiry in its pursuit of truth and understanding? Clearly, paraconsistent logic expands the boundaries of logical space by allowing for the accommodation of contradictions without leading into logical explosion. This enables us to engage with the divine in its full and profound complexity, permitting it to exist and be understood as it is, even if it seems to challenge our common understanding of reality. The greater our efforts to eliminate contradictions in the doctrine of the Incarnation, the more we risk distorting the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ, thereby giving rise

41. Thomas McCall, *Analytic Christology and the Theological Interpretation of the New Testament* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), pg. 183.

to heretical interpretations. Despite its apparent contradictory implications, paraconsistent logic maintains the integrity of the Christological contradiction without devolving into logical incoherence. This enables theological reasoning to proceed without the risk of falling into logical explosion.

To conclude, Beall's contradictory Christology challenges our common epistemic assumption that any theology must always conform to the principles of logical consistency. Instead of attempting to resolve the logical tension between the full humanity and full divinity of Christ, Beall embraces this tension as a real and true contradiction. He argues that this approach remains more faithful to the traditional teachings of the Church than the rational attempts to reconcile the contradiction logically, such as those found in Arianism, Nestorianism, and Modalism, among others. Philosophically, Beall's Christology prompts a radical rethinking of the relationship between theology and logic, prioritizing doctrinal fidelity over logical consistency, especially when it is warranted by evidence. It insists that God's nature ultimately transcends the categories of human reason. While the full implications of constructing a theology based on contradictory Christology are yet unknown, such an approach invites deeper reflection on the ontological contradiction and dilemma presented by the metaphysics of the incarnation. After all, each of us, in some way, experiences inner conflict or contradiction. The fact that God Himself experiences contradiction and inner tension serves as a profound and beautiful foundation for theology. It is precisely through this inner contradiction, by embracing our broken humanity, that Christ encountered us and, through it, offered salvation.

ST. JOHN PAUL II ON OBEDIENCE AND ITS SPIRITUALITY IN RELIGIOUS AND CONSECRATED LIFE

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Introduction

The vow of obedience is one of the principal commitments in the life of religious communities, deeply rooted in Christian theology and spiritual practice. According to Judith Schaefer, obedience is traditionally understood as "the submission of one's individual will to the will of another for the achievement of a greater good, usually spiritual perfection and/or apostolic mission."[1] However, she argues that, in the context of religious life, obedience is strictly understood as "submission of the will to God mediated through one's religious superior in all things required."[2] According to the *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* (CICLSAL) document, "The Service of Authority and Obedience," obedience generally begins with listening. Such an act is conditioned by a particular attitude seen in one like a son or a daughter. CICLSAL explains, "It is that particular kind of listening that only a son or daughter can do in listening to his or her parent because it is enlightened by the certainty that the parent has only good

1. Judith Schaefer, *The Evolution of a Vow: Obedience as Decision Making in Communion*, edited by Bernard J. Hiberath, Bradford E. Hinze, and Matthias Scharer (N.J.: LIT Verlag, 2009), 15.

2. Schaefer, *The Evolution of a Vow,* 15.

things to say and give to him or her."[3] One of the three evangelical counsels—alongside the vows of poverty and chastity—obedience forms the foundation of religious life. These counsels are rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly in His call for radical discipleship and the imitation of His own life of self-giving. In religious communities, the vow of obedience reflects a commitment to live according to God's will, as discerned through the guidance of legitimate authority within the Church. In the Catholic tradition and teachings, this vow is not merely an external observance but is intertwined with the theological understanding of surrendering one's will to God. As the CICLSAL reminds us, "Obedience to God is the path of growth and, therefore, of freedom for the person because this obedience allows for the acceptance of a plan or a will different from one's own that not only does not deaden or lessen human dignity but is its basis."[4] This vow holds particular significance for a religious congregation or institute as it reflects the charism and mission, rooted in the heroic faith and sacrifice of the founders and members, as the greatest testament of their obedience to God and imitation of Christ's kenotic sacrifice. The religious members live out their vocation in imitation of Christ's or their founder's total submission to God, expressed through their witness to the faith and obedience to Church authority.

St. John Paul II, a prominent theological figure of the 20th century and a charismatic pope during his time, offers an enriched understanding of obedience, particularly within the framework of his teachings on human freedom, personal

3. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, Roman Curia, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccscrlife/documents/rc_con_ccscrlife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html, para. 5. Hereafter CICLSAL.

4. CICLSAL, *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, par. 5.

dignity, and the theology of vocation. In one of his apostolic exhortations, *Vita Consecrata,* he said that obedience (also chastity and poverty) is "the source of true freedom" and it "appears as the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth, a way which may be called divine."[5] The vow of obedience in the religious life should be seen as a dialogue—a free and conscious response to God's call and through His instrumentalities that allows one to express one's submission to God's divine plan indirectly. Rather than blind submission, obedience involves listening, discernment, and a cooperative relationship with God's will through the exercise of willful submission to the authority of superiors and fellow brothers and sisters of the congregation. In this way, one fosters deeper communion and participation in the Church's mission.

The paper seeks to explore and deepen the theological understanding of the vow of obedience and its spirituality in the context of a religious and consecrated life through the lens of St. John Paul II's teachings on obedience. Integrating his theological insights aims to provide a renewed understanding of obedience that emphasizes freedom, mutual dialogue, trust, listening to the Spirit within, and the active participation of religious in discerning God's will. This enriched interpretation hopes to contribute to the spiritual growth of religious and consecrated persons and strengthen their commitment to living out their respective charisms in today's world.

The Theological and Religious Context of the Vow of Obedience

This section discusses obedience within a theological and religious context. It examines obedience as a spiritual/

5. John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), 24 & 11-12.

theological vow and social virtue. The chapter emphasizes the vow of obedience and its essential character, which, contrary to common and secular belief, means aligning one's will with God, which fosters personal and communal holiness as its reward or fruit. This kind of obedience is modeled after Christ himself and his relationship with his divine Father in heaven. It reminds us that blind obedience is of the past. Today, there must be a balance between obedience and dialogue, ensuring obedience remains a conscious, faith-driven act rather than an unquestioning submission to authority.

Obedience is a powerful form of social influence, compelling individuals to respond to direct orders from authority figures. According to Milgram, it is fundamental to communal living: "Some system of authority is a requirement of all communal living."[6] This behavior embodies respect and mindfulness toward rules, laws, and commands, acting as a psychological mechanism—a "dispositional cement that binds men [and women alike] to systems of authority."[7] However, the perception of obedience often carries a negative connotation, as many view it as the antithesis of freedom. Anderson provocatively describes it as "a rock of offense" because it represents the sovereignty against which freedom-loving individuals have historically revolted.[8] This perspective may stem from a rationalist viewpoint that, as St. John Paul II articulates, leads to an insensitivity toward revelation and divine transcendence. Such rationalism encourages self-centered individual-

6. Stanley Milgram, "The Dilemma of Obedience," *The Phi Delta Kappan* vol. 55, no. 9 (May 1974): 603-606. See p. 603.

7. Milgram, "The Dilemma of Obedience," 603.

8. Bernhard W. Anderson, "The Biblical Ethic of Obedience," *The Christian Scholar* vol. 39, no. 1 (1956): 66-71. See p. 66.

ism, which hinders true human relationships.[9] In contrast, Tuttle argues that obedience is "a convenience—a very great convenience, and, at certain stages, an indispensable convenience,"[10] particularly for children who can be guided to follow commands. While Tuttle views obedience as less noble in a democratic context that values choice.

Peter Baelz supports this argument, saying that "among that obedience has fallen out of favor, no longer ranking among the top virtues in contemporary society."[11] He points out that many people do not respect authority, leading them to question the moral value of the internal promptings that drive obedience. Nevertheless, Baelz emphasizes that obedience transcends merely following authority; in Christianity, it signifies a "proper response of man [people] to God."[12] Christ epitomized this kind of obedience, showcasing a "symphonic" harmony between obedience, love for God, and existence itself. In this light, understanding obedience through the lens of Christ's exemplary behavior reveals its essential role in guiding individuals within society and in their spiritual lives.[13]

However, one should note that "obey" in Hebrew means "listen."[14] In the biblical context, it means hearing God's call or word, which presupposes a personal relationship between the hearer and the speaker. This sense of obedience has been

9. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* [Apostolic Exhortations] (Kerala, India: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 681:7.

10. Harold Saxe Tuttle, "Obedience: A Necessary Convenience," *The Elementary School Journal* vol. 43, no. 6 (Feb 1943): 343-346. See p. 343.

11. Baelz, "Obedience," 186.

12. Baelz, "Obedience," 187.

13. Joshua R. Brown, "Christ's 'Symphonic' Obedience: Exploring Hans Urs Von Balthasar's Archetypal Experience through Han Confucianism," *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 25, no. 4 (2016): 439-458. See p. 439.

14. Anderson, "The Biblical Ethic of Obedience," 66.

forgotten when many consecrated religious persons think of obedience. Hearing is not necessarily passive. It requires the active involvement of the hearer in what is being heard. It is an active mode of listening where the one who hears responds to the hearing. The response, whatever that is (either not answering yes or no to the call), is considered an active movement of one's inner self toward the hearing. In this sense, obedience implies dialogue. To be more specific, the kind of obedience that this study considers is religious in nature, that is, religious obedience, which has its distinct character and meaning compared to other notions of obedience, like civil obedience. As Fr. John Lozano puts it, "religious obedience is submission, freely chosen as a distinctive trait of a certain type of Christian existence, to a human authority which, as such, is not part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy although it has an ecclesiastical significance."[15] Similarly, Fr. Peter Cotel defines religious obedience as "consists in this, that man for the sake of pleasing the Lord, voluntarily puts himself in a state of subjection to another in whatever he may command that is not contrary to the rule."[16] Karl Rahner sees religious obedience not like that of a child who obeys their parents. In "Reflections on Obedience," Rahner explains,

> Superiors should not act as if by nature or by reason of their office they are more intelligent, more clever, more morally steadfast, or more provident and wiser in the ways of the world. This may be true in individual cases,

15. John M. Lozano, C.M.F., *Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, translated by Beatrice Wilczynski (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1980), 221.

16. Fr. Peter Cotel, S.J., *Principles of Religious Life: An Explanation of the "Catechism of the Vows,"* revised and adapted to the Code of Canon Law by Fr. Emile Jombart, S.J., translated from the 4th French edition by Fr. T. Lincoln Bouscaren, S.J. (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1926), 213.

> for the world is not so constructed that only the more stupid become superiors.[17]

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* also defines religious obedience as the "general submission which religious vow to God, and voluntarily promise to their superiors, in order to be directed by them in ways of perfection according to the purpose and constitutions of their order."[18] Similarly, the CICLSAL reiterates that the "first act of obedience on the part of the creature is that of coming into existence in conformity with the divine *fiat* that calls one into being."[19]

While obedience is a fundamental concept in various contexts, including psychology, education, religion, and social relationships, this study draws its reflection and analysis from theological-religious and spiritual rather than social, though the social dimension remains valuable.

St. John Paul II's View of Obedience and Its Theological and Spiritual Foundations

Pope St. John Paul II consistently taught that the vow of obedience is at the heart of consecrated religious life. His homilies and writings present religious obedience as an imitation of Christ's obedience unto death (Phil 2:8) and a path to true freedom and holiness. This section examines St. John Paul II's reflections on the vow of obedience for consecrated individuals, highlighting its theological foundations—especially its Christocentric, ecclesial, Trinitarian, and pneumatological dimensions—and exploring his spirituality of obedience.

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17. Karl Rahner, S.J., "Reflection on Obedience – A Basic Ignatian Concept," translated by Erwin W. Geissman, *CrossCurrents* 10, no. 4 (1960): 363-74. See pp. 363-364.

18. Arthur Vermeersch, "Religious Obedience," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11182a.htm.

19. CICLSAL, "The Service of Authority and Obedience."

The Christological Foundation of Obedience based on St. John Paul II's Teachings

St. John Paul II anchors the meaning of the vow of obedience in the example of Jesus Christ, frequently citing St. Paul's hymn in *Philippians* 2:6-8 (Christ "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross"). In his 1984 apostolic exhortation, *Redemptionis Donum*, he expressed that by acknowledging this obedience, "we touch the very essence of the Redemption."[20] This obedience is characterized by Christ's total surrender to the will of God, culminating in His crucifixion. This profound act of obedience amidst personal suffering highlights His deep commitment to fulfilling the divine plan for humanity's salvation. Those who profess this vow aim to "share in the obedience of that 'one man' by whose obedience all will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Hence, monks, nuns, and religious brothers or priests decide to emulate Christ, "who, by an obedience which carried Him even to death on the cross, redeemed humanity and made it holy."[21] This Christocentric perspective transforms the religious vow of obedience into a living re-enactment of Christ's submission to the Father. It transcends a mere external act of following rules. When those in consecrated life take this vow, they are not merely agreeing to abide by the directives of religious superiors but are committing to imitate Christ's perfect submission to the will of the Father. This commitment is tailored to their unique calling, reflected in their work, relationships, and various aspects of religious life. In his 1983 address to the Jesuits' audience, he emphasized that "obedience on the grounds of faith should be a sign of your close imitation of Christ, who was obedient even to

20. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Redemptionis Donum* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, March 1984), 14.

21. Ibid., 14.

death on the Cross."[22] In other words, the obedience expected from Christians, especially those who commit to religious life, must mirror Christ's own, as He chose to humble Himself and submit entirely to the Father's will, even accepting suffering and death freely out of love.

Equally vital to understanding John Paul II's view of religious obedience is to see obedience not as servile but as filial. It is an act of voluntary submission rooted in love. *Vita Consecrata* says, "obedience, practiced in imitation of Christ...shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial."[23] Servile obedience, often marked by fear or coercion, leads individuals to comply out of obligation or threat, lacking the inner freedom essential for genuine human flourishing. In contrast, filial obedience reflects the relationship between Jesus and the Father. It is "a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons"[24] of the Holy Trinity. Those who obey out of filial love do so freely, motivated to honor their beloved. This deeper relationship is characterized by love and gratitude, not by anticipating punishment or self-interest. By labeling religious obedience as "filial," Pope John Paul II suggests it represents a more authentic submission, recognizing God as a loving Father whose will is benevolent and life-affirming. Thus, obedience becomes a personal expression of love and trust, reflecting a free choice to follow God's will.[25] He said that "the obedience to which you commit-

22. John Paul II, "Homily to the Members of the 33rd General Congregation (Sept. 1983)," para 8, https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1983_johnpauliihomilygc33/#:~:text=Christ%20is%20your%20sole%20treasure,also%20the%20Synod%20of%20Reconciliation.

23. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata,* 21.

24. Ibid.

25. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* [Encyclical] (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993).

ted yourselves by consecrating yourselves without reserve to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a particular expression of interior freedom, just as the definitive expression of Christ's freedom was His obedience 'unto death.'"[26] Thus, authentic obedience represents the fullest exercise of freedom, not its negation.

The evangelical counsels, particularly the vow of obedience, are expressions of the Kingdom of God already present, pointing toward its future fulfillment. The consecrated person, through obedience, lives a sign of the ultimate reign of God.[27] It means that the religious who live out the vow of obedience are following Christ's example of submission to the Father and embodying **the already-but-not-yet** Kingdom of God. While living out in the present, their obedience anticipates the perfect obedience of all creation to God that will be realized in the eschaton. **Through their lives, consecrated persons proclaim that the Kingdom of God has already begun to break into the world and that it will one day come in its fullness.**

The Trinitarian Foundation of Obedience based on St. John Paul II's Teachings

Another fundamental principle of religious obedience is its Trinitarian nature. The obedience of Christ ultimately reflects an expression of Trinitarian love, specifically the Son's love for and obedience to the Father. Consequently, the obedience of the consecrated individual possesses a Trinitarian character. "The characteristic feature of Jesus – the chaste, poor, and obedient one – are perpetually evident amidst the world,"[28] through

26. *Redemptionis Donum,* 13.

27. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*.

28. Ibid., 1.

the consecrated life, thereby directing **the gaze of the faithful toward "the mystery of the Kingdom"** (cf. Mk 10:15). Consecrated men and women, responding to the call of the Father and the inspiration of the Spirit, *pursue* Christ with undivided hearts. From a Trinitarian perspective, the vow of obedience is a manifestation of our identity as children of the Father through the Son. Through their obedience, they aspire to convey their comprehension of being children of the Father, as succinctly expressed by John Paul II.[29]

In *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II taught that the evangelical counsels, and obedience in particular, place consecrated persons within the dynamic of Trinitarian love: "When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ…it becomes an expression of the total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another…Obedience, practiced in imitation of Christ…is a reflection in the history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons."[30] In this profound reflection, St. John Paul II reveals that poverty and obedience are moral virtues and pathways to the eternal love between the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. Christ's life, marked by poverty and obedience, becomes the model for how Christians live these virtues. By doing so, they enter into the divine life and reflect the unity, harmony, and self-giving love of the Trinity in history. Poverty, when lived as Christ lived it, becomes an expression of total self-gift, and obedience reflects the loving harmony of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Together, these virtues form a profound spiritual union with God and allow Christians to participate in the very essence of divine love. Obedience thus reflects the Son's **self-surrender to the Father** and the Holy Spirit's action. Moreover, the consecrated

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 21.

life "proclaims" the Trinity: "The consecrated life... becomes a confession and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model and source of every form of Christian life," John Paul II writes.[31] The fraternal communion that arises from shared obedience in a community is an eloquent witness to the Trinity, mirroring the unity of Persons. It means that the fraternal communion within the Christian community, founded on shared obedience and love, becomes a visible sign of the invisible unity and love within the Godhead. Just as the three Divine Persons of the Trinity are united in their love and mutual self-giving, so is the community united in their obedience to God and love for one another. Through its shared life of obedience, the community reflects the deeper spiritual reality of God's inner life. In short, the vow of obedience possesses a profound **theological depth**. It is Christological (as it imitates the Son) and relationally Trinitarian (sharing in the Son's relationship with the Father through the Spirit's grace). Thus, obedience engages the entire person in response to the Triune God.

The Ecclesiological Foundation of Obedience based on St. John Paul II's Teachings

St. John Paul II also situates religious obedience firmly in the context of the Church, underlining its **ecclesial dimension**. He emphasizes that the vow of obedience in religious life has an **essential ecclesial and missionary dimension**. When a religious person submits to their legitimate superiors for the love of God, it is not only a private virtue but "an ecclesial act." By vow, religious bind themselves "to the Lord in a

31. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata.*

special way," but **always "through the Church."**[32] Obedience is lived **within an ecclesial structure**. Consecrated persons promise obedience to their legitimate superiors according to the rule of each institute.[33] This is based on the faith that Christ entrusts authority to the Church's pastors and religious superiors as '**mediators' of His will**. The Letter to the Hebrews exhorts, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls" (Heb 13:17) – a verse John Paul II frequently quoted to religious.[34] He believed that **religious submission to superiors, given in faith, is an extension of one's obedience to God.** For example, addressing a gathering of Jesuits – who take a special fourth vow of obedience to the Pope – John Paul II explained that the **"most secret motivation"** for their distinctive obedience is that of being able to respond 'immediately, without delay' to the needs of the Church. Here, we see the ecclesial purpose. Obedience makes the religious **available for mission wherever the Church needs,** in union with the hierarchy. He believed the Church counts on religious people's complete and generous obedience as collaborators in her apostolic mission. Consecrated persons are called to "think with the Church" (*sentire cum Ecclesia*) and act in union with the Magisterium and their pastors.[35] This ecclesial obedience ensures that the **charisms of religious orders remain at the service of ecclesial communion** rather than personal whim. He even warned that if the "tether" of the vow of obedience to the Pope were loosened, an elite order could stray into becoming a "freelancing clique...convinced

32. John Paul II, *Special Message of Pope John Paul II for World Day of Consecrated Life*, Speeches, 2005, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/consecrated_life/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20050202_consecrated-life.html.

33. See *Redemptionis Donum.*

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

that its own superior intelligence and moral rectitude allowed it to carve out its own path,"[36] undermining unity. With this, fidelity to the vow of obedience safeguards the religious institute's **communion with the Church's authority.**

The Pneumatological Foundation of Obedience based on St. John Paul II's Teachings

Another theological foundation of obedience, often implicit, is pneumatological – relating to the Holy Spirit. John Paul II highlights that the ability to obey in faith is a gift of the Spirit at work in the Church. In *Redemptionis Donum*, he wrote that Christ's example **derives from the "total availability to the Holy Spirit,"** a characteristic of religious obedience.[37] The Holy Spirit prompts individuals to undertake the consecrated life and **guides them in living out obedience**. The "promptings of the Spirit" led men and women of every age to embrace this special way of following Christ. It means, therefore, that theological reflection on obedience cannot omit the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring and sustaining it. The vow is **taken "in the Holy Spirit"** (invoked in the liturgy of religious profession), and only by the Spirit's grace can one live an obedience that transcends natural motives. He notes that obedience makes a person particularly sensitive to the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, the direct and personal guide of souls.[38] In fact, the entire consecrated life, he says, is "prompted by the Holy Spirit" to be an "abiding re-enactment in the Church" of Christ's obedient mission.[39] This underscores that religious obedience is not mere submission to human authority, but first

36. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 425.

37. John Paul II, *Redemptionis Donum*.

38. Ibid.

39. See *Vita Consecrata.*

a **listening to the Holy Spirit** who speaks through Scripture, the Church, one's rule, and even the events of life. In John Paul II's spirituality, we shall see that attentiveness to the Spirit in one's heart is a key component of obedience.

St. John Paul II's Spirituality of Obedience

John Paul II's homilies and teaching documents illustrate a **spirituality of obedience** – a lived attitude of **listening**, trust, and self-gift to God. He often spoke in pastoral and poetic terms about how consecrated persons should understand and live out their vow.

Listening to God and His Word

At the core of obedience is listening. John Paul II frequently emphasized that religious obedience begins with an attentive hearing and listening of God's voice. This happens primarily through Scripture and prayer. In the Jubilee 2000 homily for religious, he reminded consecrated persons that their "first vocation...is to be with [Christ], to be in communion with him, listening to his words in constant praise of God."[40] Thus, obedience is rooted in **contemplation**. It is a habitual openness to God's Word and desire. He also referenced the long monastic tradition of ***lectio divina*** as part of the life of obedience. Western monks, he notes, seek a balance of prayer and work expressed in "conversion of life, obedience and stability, and in persevering dedication to meditation to God's word (*lectio divina*), the celebration of the Liturgy and prayer."[41] In cloistered communities, the whole day is structured as an act of listening to God, whether in the silence of one's cell or the chanting of the Divine Office.

40. St. John Paul II, *Homily, [IV Day of Consecrated Life]* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, February 2000).

41. See *Vita Consecrata*.

John Paul II saw this immersion in Scripture and prayer as essential for an obedient heart. He taught that the Holy Spirit "opens our hearts to his inspiration" and draws consecrated people into deeper **"love for the Father"** so that obeying God becomes one's delight.[42] Indeed, **the Blessed Virgin Mary** stands out prominently in his spirituality of obedience. At the Annunciation, Mary's fiat – "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38) – is the perfect act of obedience in listening faith.[43] John Paul II often held Mary up as "the first of the consecrated," whose "yes" to God's word enabled the Incarnation. He encouraged the religious to cultivate Mary's listening heart and her docility to God's Word at every moment.[44] For John Paul II, a **listening obedience** means an interior posture that actively seeks God's will through Scripture, prayer, and openness to divine promptings. Notably, he himself was an intensely prayerful man. His biographers observe that **he would spend long hours in prayer, seeking to conform himself to whatever God might ask**.[45] This personal witness lends credence to his exhortations that obedience flourishes in a life of deep prayer.

Obedience through Mediators: Superiors, Community, and Signs of the Times

For John Paul II, obedience to God necessitates attentive listening to and adherence to the guidance provided by human authorities who embody God's will in the world. This may encompass leaders within religious communities, ecclesiastical authorities, or even the wider framework of societal structures entrenched in moral and spiritual values. He underscores

42. *Vita Consecrata*.

43. *Redemptionis Donum.*

44. Ibid.

45. Weigel, *Witness to Hope.*

that God's will is frequently conveyed to us through **human instruments**—such as priests, bishops, educators, or parents—who direct others along the pathway of righteousness. Just as the Incarnation of Christ signifies that God's love and will are manifested in human form, obedience within the Christian life constitutes a response to God's will as it is mediated through genuine human experiences. In this regard, obedience is not characterized by passive submission but is rather an active, responsive engagement with God's plan as it unfolds in the world.

Among the mediators within the sphere of religious life are the lawful superiors of the institute. John Paul II articulates that by adhering to superiors **"who hold the place of God,"** religious individuals fundamentally obey God in faith.[46] He consistently reminded the religious community that their vow extends not only to God in a somewhat abstract manner, but also tangibly and concretely to those who serve in the capacity of God, specifically their superiors. By embracing this notion of **"concrete submission"** of their will to a human superior, the religious provide a compelling testament that God is trustworthy and actively engaged through the Church's order.

Listening to One's Heart and the Holy Spirit Within

The spirituality of obedience articulated by John Paul II is profoundly internalized. It underscores that the Holy Spirit communicates within the depths of an obedient heart. He posits that consecrated life is embraced by individuals who are obedient to the Father's call and the promptings of the Spirit.[47] Practically speaking, this necessitates that a religious individual cultivates an attentive conscience and an acute sensitivity

46. *Redemptionis Donum*.

47. *Vita Consecrata.*

to the movements of the Spirit. In *Redemptionis Donum,* the Pope expressed that evangelical obedience renders one particularly attuned to the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, the direct Author of all holiness. This assertion highlights the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying the faithful and the Church. The action of the Spirit is inherently internal and profoundly personal, facilitating a renewal **of the individual's desires, attitudes, and actions** within the depths of the heart and mind. This transformation operates as a mystery, encompassing the interior workings of God within the soul, often transcending human comprehension. It embodies a **grace-filled process,** frequently imperceptible in its immediate effects to the believer, yet impactful in its overarching outcomes.

The view of obedience as the Holy Spirit speaks within is the affirmation of human agency or freedom, and that of God's will does not create a conflict. Take, for instance, the Constitution of the Society of Jesus. It says,

> Obedience is always an act of faith and freedom whereby the religious recognizes and embraces the will of God manifested to him by one who has authority to send him in the name of Christ. But both the superior who sends and the companion who is sent gain assurance that the mission is really God's will if it is preceded by special dialogue.[48]

When rightly lived, obedience becomes a supreme act of freedom because it entails aligning one's will with what one sincerely discerns as God's will—even when that will be presented through external authority. This model of obedience, rooted in the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, requires the religious to be interiorly free. That is, one must be free

48. Society of Jesus, *Constitution of the Society of Jesus,* section 3, 150:1, https://www.manresa.ie/sites/default/files/2024-09/Constitutions%20and%20Norms%20SJ%20ingls.pdf.

from ego, fear, self-interest, or resentment. Without this inner freedom, obedience becomes servile. With it, obedience becomes self-offering. It is a liberation from self-will in favor of divine mission.

Today, we are accustomed to the Spirit speaking without and within through the Church authorities, superiors, and our interiority. In relation to the vow of obedience, it means that we will each have to discern the authenticity of the Spirit speaking within the individual.

Dialogue and Fraternal Trust

A notable aspect of the post-Vatican II spirituality of obedience, as reflected by John Paul II, is the importance of **dialogue** between superiors and those who heed their guidance. Before Vatican II, obedience in religious life often resembled a rigid**, authoritarian framework** in which superiors issued orders, and subordinates were expected to follow them unquestioningly. In contrast, Vatican II introduced a more **relational** perspective on obedience, emphasizing the **dialogical nature** of interactions between leaders and their followers. Obedience has shifted from a simple command-obey relationship to one characterized **by mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration**. This interpretation encourages communication and active **listening from** both parties. Furthermore, Vatican II emphasized that obedience transcends mere rule-following. It represents a response **to God's calling** and **a commitment** to communal living. It is framed as a form **of discipleship**, where one listens attentively to God and the community, with the superior evolving from simply issuing commands to guiding, discerning, and assisting individuals in responding to God's will in their lives.

Trustful Surrender

At the heart of John Paul II's spirituality of obedience is **complete trust in God and surrender to His providence**. He often used words like "surrender," "abandonment," "self-gift," and "offering" to describe the inner posture of an obedient soul. **Surrender** is perhaps one of the most powerful terms he used to characterize the interior life of someone truly obedient to God. It suggests a **total giving over** of oneself to God's will, a **letting go of control, and** acknowledging that **God knows better** than the individual what is truly good for them. In this context, obedience is an act of **trust** and **humility**, where the person yields to God, surrendering their own desires, plans, and control in favor of God's purposes. He also connected this surrender with **martyrdom** and witness, which the Congregation of the Korean Martyrs and many other congregations can attest to through martyrdom narratives. Ultimate obedience may mean literally sacrificing **one's life**, following Christ to the Cross. The Holy Father held up the 20th-century martyrs as exemplars of obedient surrender, and he beatified and canonized many of them. He saw this extreme trust – "Obedience unto death" –as a victory because it shares in Christ's resurrection.[49] For most religious, daily life will not call for a bloody martyrdom, but it does call for a "white martyrdom" of dying to self-will. John Paul II assures that dying with Christ leads to life and resurrection in one's ministry. Self-abandonment is a fundamental act of **spiritual freedom** because surrendering oneself to God releases an individual from the myriad anxieties and burdens that typically arise from the desire to control every facet of life. By letting go of this excessive need for control, individuals can redirect

49. See John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* [Encyclical] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, March 1979), 21.

their focus to diligently following God's call, instilling a sense of trust that He will lead them on the right path.

To end this section, John Paul II's spirituality of obedience, marked by listening, humility, trust, and courageous surrender, presents a practical way to live out this vow. He encourages individual religious members and their superiors to cultivate an **"obedience of faith"** (Rom 1:5) through prayerful dialogue and discernment. Listening to God's voice, obeying His will through human mediators, following the Holy Spirit within, and embracing obedience with trust and joyful surrender all contribute to this understanding. Under his guidance, obedience is far from passive. It involves creative cooperation with God's grace, requiring the full engagement of intellect and will, directed by love. Remarkably, John Paul II relates obedience with genuine **freedom and human fulfillment**, contrasting with modern theories that oppose freedom and obedience. "Those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev 14:4) – a phrase he uses to describe consecrated souls – are paradoxically the freest and most joyful, for they have discovered the pearl of great price.

Contextualizing Obedience and Its Practices within a Religious Congregation or Institute

This section discusses how St. John Paul II's insights and ideas can be concretized and contextualized using my personal experience as a professed member of a religious congregation. Though I believe similarities abound regarding experiences related to assignments, work, and the like, this is not to say that the same character or scenario can be found in several other congregations or institutes.

Within a religious congregation, obedience is woven into the fabric of daily community life. The community members

regard obedience not merely as an external rule to observe but as a meaningful choice that resonates deeply with their faith and identity. In their view, to obey is fundamentally to "hear God's word or call" speaking through various mediations – their superiors, their community, and the needs of the Church. Perhaps, religious constitutions explicitly teach that the vow of obedience is anchored in attentive listening to God's voice. This commitment goes far beyond passive submission. It entails actively engaging the soul in discerning and carrying out God's desires. Each decision or assignment is part of an ongoing conversation with God.

Practically, a religious community has instituted concrete practices to ensure that obedience is lived as a dialogue and a communal discernment rather than a one-sided command. A key element of this practice is understanding the role of religious superiors. Superiors (such as those in charge of formation) are not seen as mere authority figures issuing orders. They are regarded as spiritual mentors and stewards entrusted with the brothers' welfare. The relationship between the superior and the brothers or sisters is characterized by mutual respect and trust. Superiors are called to embody the humility and servant-leadership of Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve" (cf. Mark 10:45). This means that a superior's task is not to exert power for its own sake but to guide and accompany the brothers toward holiness and the fulfillment of God's mission. Superiors strive to imitate Christ's example of gentle authority – providing direction and correction when needed, but always with love, patience, and understanding.

One concrete practice illustrating this ethos is the regular community meetings and consultations. Important decisions in the community – whether they concern the assignment of ministries, community projects, or the daily schedule – are

usually preceded by times of collective discussion and prayer. Each brother or sister is encouraged to voice their thoughts, concerns, and insights with candor and respect during these meetings. This forum allows the community to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance. It is understood that the truth may emerge through the members' contributions, not only from the superior. The superior, for his part, attentively listens to the brothers' or sisters' viewpoints. By fostering such dialogue, the community follows the injunction of the Church that superiors should consult their brothers or sisters, and all should collaboratively discern God's will. While the final decision and responsibility rest with the superior (perhaps in the case of some congregations, if not all, to whom the community has entrusted authority), that decision is informed by the community's "collective wisdom" and discernment. This process reflects the early Church's own practice, for example, in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15:1-29), where the apostles and elders met to discern God's will on a contentious issue, and the resolution came from communal discussion guided by the Holy Spirit.

When a decision or command is given, the members approach obedience thoughtfully and prayerfully. Someone does not obey "automatically" or unthinkingly. Rather, one interiorizes the instruction as part of his dialogue with God. For instance, if a superior assigns you a task outside your comfort zone or personal preference, you are invited to see this not simply as "an order to follow" but as "an opportunity to hear God's voice" through your superior's request. You would likely take the matter to prayer, asking for the grace to understand and embrace God's will in this situation. In conversation with your superior, you might seek clarification or express any difficulties, not in a spirit of resistance but in pursuit of understanding God's intention. This practice aligns

with St. Ignatius of Loyola's classic counsel that superiors and subjects should strive to find God's will together, with subjects allowed to manifest their needs or opinions humbly to superiors. This process encourages open communication. By doing so, obedience becomes a Trinitarian relationship –the superior listens to you, while you listen to your superior, and you both listen to God. Genuine obedience, therefore, involves actively listening to God's voice, which often speaks through human authorities and community dialogue.

As a religious community member, our daily life provides many ordinary contexts in which this obedient dialogue with God is exercised. The community members live according to a common schedule that includes times for prayer, work, meals, and ministry. Adhering to the community timetable is an act of obedience that everyone accepts for order and the common good, even in small tasks. For example, a brother might be assigned a seemingly mundane duty such as cleaning the chapel, preparing meals, or organizing the community's library. At first glance, such chores could appear purely routine or even tedious. However, from a spiritual outlook on it, one can say that no task is "merely secular" or insignificant. The brother or sister is encouraged to carry out the chore conscientiously and with love, offering it to God. One recognizes that obeying these small matters imitates Christ's humility in washing the disciples' feet. Each simple act of obedience – sweeping the floor, washing dishes, running an errand – becomes a chance to practice virtue. Through this obedience, one cultivates humility (by placing the community's needs above their own convenience), patience (by enduring monotony or difficulty with minimal to no harm complaint), and charity (by serving others quietly). Over time, this faithful performance of duty can spark an inner transformation. Many can testify that tasks one initially disliked became, through obedience and grace,

moments of unexpected closeness to God. In other words, even the tiniest aspects of daily existence can reveal God's will and presence if approached in a spirit of obedience and love.

Obedience also involves the readiness to accept apostolic assignments and transfers for the sake of the mission. The congregation likely engages in pastoral and evangelical. Superiors, after discernment, may ask a brother or a sister to take on a new ministry or responsibility. For example, one is assigned to serve in a parish, teach in a school, care for the poor, or perhaps assume a leadership role within the community. Such assignments are given considering the community's needs and the member's abilities, but they might still be challenging for the individual. A young priest (like months-old or two-year-old in the priesthood) might be sent to a remote mission, or a brother/sister who prefers contemplative work might be asked to handle administrative duties. In these situations, the vow of obedience is tested and proven. The brother, trusting in God, accepts the mission from his superior as God's will for him at that time. The process is typically accompanied by dialogue. The superior would explain the reasons and confirm through prayer that this is indeed what God is asking, and the brother/sister might share their feelings or fears. By saying "yes" to the call, the brother imitates the Blessed Mother Mary's *fiat* ("Let it be done to me according to your word," Luke 1:38). In doing so, one finds that one's obedience opens one to growth. One discovers talents one did not know one had. Such episodes reinforce the community's understanding that when God (through obedience) asks for something, He also gives the strength to fulfill it. One's trusting surrender accomplishes an external task and deepens one's faith and reliance on God.

Importantly, as religious members, we see obedience as a collective or communal act. When each member lives

obediently, the whole community benefits. One can speak of obedience as a "unifying force" in the congregation. By conforming to God's will as a body, they move together harmoniously towards their common goals. This unity is especially evident when the community faces major decisions or undertakes significant projects. For example, if your congregation is discerning whether to open a new mission station or initiate a particular apostolate, all the members may be involved in prayer and discussion. After due discernment, suppose the leadership decides to proceed with the project. Even brothers who initially had reservations will practice obedience by embracing the decision as "our decision under God." They set aside lingering personal opinions and throw their support behind the community's direction. This common obedience ensures a unified plan execution, preventing factions or undermining attitudes. It also gives each member a sense of contributing to something larger than themselves – "not my will, but God's will be done through us." If conflicts or differences of perspective arise (as naturally happens among any group of humans), the vow of obedience helps resolve them. This kind of mutual submission for the sake of God's will guarantees that personal agendas do not derail the community's mission.

The religious community life gives flesh to the theology of obedience. It illustrates how structures like superiors, constitutions, meetings, and daily routines can be oriented toward listening for God's will as a community. Obedience is woven into everything from the smallest daily chore to the largest missionary undertaking. Through their practices, religious communities strive to ensure that obedience is not an impersonal imposition but a spiritually enriching process that involves dialogue, discernment, and mutual support. It is a way of "hearing God's call" daily and responding in faith. By living this way, members maintain that their vow of obedience

truly contributes to both personal growth and the vitality of their communal apostolate.

Conclusion

In an era that frequently venerates individual autonomy, the teachings of John Paul II illuminate the beauty of a commitment **to God**. As he articulated, religious obedience does not constitute a denial of human dignity, freedom, will, or rationality. Instead, it represents a **leap of faith** that activates one's highest faculties in submission to divine Wisdom. This obedience possesses an ecclesial testimony, as it "demonstrates the liberating beauty" of a life entirely devoted to the service of God. Furthermore, it bears a prophetic and eschatological testimony, preserving within the Church the enduring truth that "God is God" and His Kingdom alone prevails. John Paul II expressed profound gratitude and confidence in consecrated individuals who embrace this vow "generously and faithfully," referring to them as "distinctive witnesses of love" within the People of God. He relied upon their obedience to yield "fruits of holiness and apostolate" for the Church and the world.

In conclusion, the homilies and writings of St. John Paul II delve deeply into the concept of religious obedience, characterizing it as a journey of radical discipleship that mirrors the life of Christ. This obedience encompasses a *vow* made within the ecclesiastical community, serves as a daily *virtue* to be embodied in everyday life, and is ultimately a self-giving offering to God. John Paul II presents an intellectually profound and spiritually uplifting understanding of obedience by weaving together Thomistic theology, personalist philosophy, and the rich experiences of the saints. His teachings, as evidenced by numerous citations, emphasize that **the vow of obedience is fundamentally rooted in love—specifically,** a consecrated

person's love for Christ and His Church. This commitment is a response to the immense love demonstrated by Christ, who is referred to as "the obedient One" and whose saving love is expressed through obedience, acting as a guiding *light for the world* and a ferment of renewal within the Church (as noted in *Vita Consecrata* concerning *the* influence of consecrated life on culture). Ultimately, John Paul II's perspective not only calls upon those in religious life but all members of the faithful to rediscover the joy and freedom that arises from the heartfelt acceptance of God's will, encapsulated in the prayer: "Let it be done unto me according to Your word" (Luke 1:38).

THE MANDATE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE RULE OF LAW: A THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES' ROLE AFTER *DUTERTE V. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*

Kerr Nell S. Deliva

Introduction: A *Kairos* of Institutional Vocation

This article presents a theological-ethical framework for analyzing the landmark Supreme Court decision in Duterte v. House of Representatives.[1] It posits that the tension between the House of Representatives' exercise of its impeachment power and the Supreme Court's judicial review constitutes a significant *kairos*—a moment of public revelation that clarifies the distinct vocations of the nation's coequal branches.

Political developments of transcendental importance are often moments of profound public revelation. In theological terms, revelation is not confined to the historical or written deposit of faith; the Divine continues to disclose its will in the "signs of the times."[2] A national moment wherein the Supreme Court renders its decision in an impeachment process

1. GR Nos. 278353 and 278359.

2. Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), 4. The full passage urges the Church to *"scrutinize the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel."* This principle, foundational to post-conciliar theology, validates the use of contemporary events as loci for theological reflection.

initiated by the House of Representatives is precisely such a sign. It represents a *kairos*,[3] an opportune and decisive moment distinct from mere chronological time (*chronos*), where the moral fabric of a society, its understanding of power, and the authentic vocations of its institutions are laid bare.

The *Duterte v. House of Representatives* has transformed the political landscape by declaring the Articles of Impeachment against the Vice President "barred," "unconstitutional," and "null and void *ab initio*."[4] What began as a legislative process precipitated by public grievances has evolved into a moment of material, institutional, and procedural delineation. The House of Representatives, as the organ of government closest to the sovereign will of the people, is vested with the solemn and "exclusive power to initiate all cases of impeachment."[5] This is not merely a political function but a sacred duty; a constitutional trust to act as the "grand inquest of the nation,"[6] giving voice to the people's demand for integrity and cry for accountability. The impeachment drive was an exercise of

3. German-American Paul Tillich defines *kairos* as "the right time" for a decisive action that creates a new possibility. It is a qualitative, opportune moment, not merely a point in time. In this context, the Supreme Court's decision is a *kairos* because it forces a critical reflection on the nature of power and accountability in the Republic.

4. *Duterte v. House of Representatives*, July 25, 2025, p. 95

5. 1987 PHIL. CONST. art. XI, § 3, cl. 1. The late Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J., a framer of the Constitution, noted that this exclusivity pertains to the initiation, meaning no other body can initiate impeachment. See Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J., *The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines: A Commentary* (Quezon City: Rex Bookstore, 2009).

6. This term, originating from British parliamentary history, describes the House of Commons' role in investigating and demanding accountability from officials of the Crown. Its adoption into Philippine constitutional parlance emphasizes the inquisitorial and accountability-focused nature of the House's exclusive impeachment power.

this duty, a response to a perceived crisis of public trust—*fides publica*[7]—that threatened the common good.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that such a process is never divorced from the political realities and divisions within the nation. The impeachment was a contentious issue, and to presume the House's action represented the unified will of the entire Filipino people would be to ignore the voices of the many citizens who did not support the move.

The Supreme Court's intervention, in exercising its own sacred duty to determine "whether or not there has been a grave abuse of discretion,"[8] established definitive legal boundaries that redirected the House's pursuit of accountability. This article confronts this reality from a standpoint that recognizes the Court's authority while simultaneously affirming the distinct institutional vocation of the House. By analyzing this moment through a theological-ethical lens, this article will explore the moral and civic responsibilities that arise when the legislative imperative for accountability meets the judicial enforcement of constitutional procedure.

The Constitutional Stakes: A Tension of Co-Equal Mandates

The impeachment power is the House's most formidable tool for exacting public accountability. It flows directly from the principle of popular sovereignty. When the House initiated proceedings against the Vice President, it acted on this

7. *Fides Publica*, or public trust, is the foundational belief of citizens in the integrity, reliability, and fairness of their governing institutions and officials. Political philosopher Onora O'Neill argues that *trust is not blind faith but is based on evidence of trustworthiness*. A perceived betrayal of this trust, therefore, is not merely a political problem but a profound moral and social crisis.

8. 1987 PHIL. CONST. art. VIII, § 1.

mandate. However, this power is always exercised within a complex political environment, where constitutional duties can intersect with partisan motivations and underlying political agendas.

The Supreme Court, in its decision, powerfully reaffirmed its role as the final arbiter of the Constitution. The *ponencia*, SAJ Marvic Leonen declared that impeachment, while having political characteristics, "is primarily a legal and constitutional procedure" and not "a purely political process isolated from the requirements of the Constitution as a whole."[9] On this basis, the Court asserted its jurisdiction and rendered a dispositive ruling on two primary grounds: the one-year bar rule and the violation of due process.

First, the Court held that the archiving of the first three impeachment complaints following the termination of the 19th Congress constituted an "effective dismissal." Consequently, the fourth impeachment complaint, initiated under the separate mode of Article XI, Section 3(4), was "already barred by Article XI, Section 3(5)."[10]

Second, and more profoundly, the Court declared the Articles of Impeachment "constitutionally infirm" for violating the fundamental right to due process. It laid out a comprehensive set of due process requirements for the one-third (1/3) signature method, including that the respondent must be given an "opportunity to be heard on the draft Articles of Impeachment and the supporting evidence" *prior* to transmittal to the Senate, and that the draft, evidence, and the respondent's comment must be made available to *all* members of the House for deliberation.[11]

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9. *Duterte v. House of Representatives*, July 25, 2025, p. 3.

10. *Duterte v. House of Representatives*, July 25, 2025, p. 4.

11. *Ibid*., 4-5.

For the House, this decision resulted in an institutional dilemma. Its "exclusive power to initiate" was now subject to explicit judicial standards. The House found its path constrained by the equally legitimate mandate of another coequal branch. This tension between the House's role as the agent of popular accountability and the Court's role as the interpreter of the law is the central constitutional and ethical problem at hand.

Foundations for a Theological-Ethical Analysis: *Centesimus Annus* on Democracy and the Rule of Law

A robust theological-ethical analysis of this dilemma requires grounding in principles that speak directly to the structure of a just and democratic society. John Paul II's encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, marking the centenary of Rerum Novarum, offers a rich tradition for the same.

A. The Principle of Participation and Accountability

The Church values the democratic system precisely because it institutionalizes the moral duty of civic participation. Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*[12], states that the Church "values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of

12. The encyclical *Centesimus Annus* was written in 1991 by Pope John Paul II on the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. In it John Paul II seeks to conduct a "re-reading" of Pope Leo's landmark encyclical to re-discover the richness of the fundamental principles in which *Rerum Novarum* dealt with the condition of workers and the economy as a whole. He reemphasizes the main focus of *Rerum Novarum* – the dignity of the worker, and therefore the dignity of work. He also mentions the right to private property (referring to land ownership) and the right to establish professional associations.

replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate[13]." (CA, #46) The House of Representatives is a primary vehicle for this participation. From this perspective, impeachment is an extraordinary constitutional tool intended to facilitate the people's right, through their representatives, to hold their leaders accountable and safeguard the moral integrity of the State.

B. The Primacy of a State Ruled by Law

While affirming participation, CA is unequivocal that authentic democracy depends on a steadfast commitment to the rule of law. A government of the people cannot be allowed to devolve into a government of mob rule or political expediency. The same encyclical clarifies that "authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person." (CA, #46) This principle provides a theological-ethical affirmation of the Supreme Court's vocation. The Court's role is not to thwart the people's will, but to ensure that the will of the people is exercised in a manner consistent with the constitutional order that protects the rights of all, including the accused. Its insistence on due process is a defense of this foundational principle.

C. Public Trust *(Fides Publica)* and the Common Good

The common good, or *bonum commune*, is threatened when *fides publica*—the foundational trust of citizens in their institutions—erodes. CA warns that "with time, such distortions of political conduct create distrust and apathy, with a subsequent decline in the political participation and civic spirit of the general population, which feels abused and disillusioned" (46). The House's actions were animated by a perception that

13. Cf. ibid., 29; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message on December 24, 1944: AAS 37 (1945), 10-20.

the allegations against the official constituted a public scandal that was damaging this trust. The historical experience of the Filipino people, particularly the EDSA narrative, provides a context where the direct expression of the people's will against perceived abuses of power is valorized. However, a mature democracy seeks to channel this moral energy into constitutional processes rather than extra-constitutional ones. The challenge, therefore, is to restore public trust not by circumventing the rule of law, but by making its processes work for accountability.

Navigating the Tension: Institutional Virtue and the Rule of Law

The constitutional dilemma at hand reveals a deeper ethical tension between the raw energy of popular discontent and the structured demands of legal order. To navigate this, institutions must be guided by specific virtues that temper passion with principle.

A. Political Prudence over Moral Impatience[14]

While moral outrage over perceived injustice can be a powerful catalyst for action, the governing virtue for a legislative

14. The argument draws on the classic understanding of Prudence (*Prudentia*) as a cardinal virtue. In Catholic moral theology, St. Thomas Aquinas refers to prudence as auriga virtutum or "the charioteer of the virtues." It is the form of practical wisdom that enables one to discern the true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it. It is defined as "right reason in action" (*recta ratio agibilium*). This virtue directly counters the vice of "moral impatience" or rashness, which can lead one to adopt procedurally flawed or intrinsically unjust means for a seemingly good end. Prudence demands deliberation and respect for established order, ensuring that the pursuit of justice is itself just. See, for example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§ 1806, 1788.

body must be prudence.[15] In the political sphere, prudence is the capacity to discern the appropriate course of action that serves the common good while respecting the intricate web of laws and relationships that constitute the state. It resists the temptation to believe that a morally urgent end can justify procedurally flawed means. The House's rapid endorsement of the Articles of Impeachment, while perhaps seen as a sign of moral urgency, was rendered by the Court to have bypassed the prudent requirements of due process.

B. The Rule of Law as a Moral Good[16]

It is essential to frame the rule of law not as a cold, legalistic barrier to justice, but as a profound moral good in itself. The

15. See *Francisco, Jr. v. House of Representatives, G.R. No. 160261 (10 November 2003).* In this case, the Supreme Court exercised its power of judicial review to resolve the political question surrounding the second impeachment complaint filed against then-Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr., which was initiated only a few months after the first. The Court's intervention, which affirmed the one-year ban on impeachment proceedings against the same official under Article XI, Section 3(5) of the 1987 Constitution, serves as a canonical example of the judiciary reining in legislative action that, while possibly driven by a sense of political or moral urgency, failed to adhere to the explicit procedural requirements laid down by the Constitution. The ruling underscores the principle that the vast powers of a legislative body are not limitless and must be exercised with the prudence of constitutional fidelity.

16. This aligns with the principles of Christian Realism, a theological framework most famously articulated by Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr argued that political structures must be built on a realistic understanding of human nature, which is capable of great justice but also inclined toward sin and self-interest. His well-known aphorism, "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary," encapsulates this view. From this perspective, the rule of law, due process, and checks and balances are not cynical mechanisms but are profound moral and theological necessities, designed to restrain the inevitable human temptation to overreach and to preserve justice from the arbitrary wills of the powerful. See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (1944).

system of checks and balances, and the due process[17] it guarantees, is a theological good because it serves as a structural safeguard against the human tendency toward overreach. It ensures that justice is not arbitrary, preventing a descent into a "mob rule" where public opinion, however intense, can override fundamental rights. The Supreme Court's decision, therefore, is not merely a procedural correction but a moral affirmation that the pursuit of accountability must occur within the very legal framework guaranteed under the Constitution.

C. Redefining "Prophetic Witness" in a Democracy

A legislative body can indeed exercise a "prophetic" function by speaking truth to power and demanding accountability on behalf of the people. However, in a constitutional democracy, this witness is expressed differently than in ancient Israel. The authentic prophetic role of Congress is not to act as an extra-systemic force that sets aside rules in the name of a higher justice. Rather, its prophetic witness lies in its diligent and often unglamorous work within the system: conducting rigorous investigations, holding officials to account in budget hearings, and crafting laws that institutionalize transparency and integrity. This is the difficult, patient work of being

17. A foundational expression of this principle in Philippine jurisprudence is *Ang Tibay v. Court of Industrial Relations, G.R. No. L-46496 (27 February 1940)*. In this landmark decision, Justice Jose P. Laurel did not treat due process as an abstract concept but laid down seven "cardinal primary rights" that must be observed in administrative proceedings. By meticulously defining the essential elements of a fair hearing—such as the right to present evidence, the need for the decision to be supported by evidence, and the independence of the tribunal—the Court affirmed that the rule of law is not a barrier to justice but its essential channel. The ruling frames procedural safeguards as the very substance of justice, preventing arbitrary exercises of power and ensuring that state actions are reasonable and predictable, thereby serving as a profound moral good.

"contemplatives in action" —channeling the passion for justice into the structures that can make that justice lasting and real.

Theological-Ethical Synthesis: The Vocation of the House of the People

A. The Moral Imperative for Accountability

The Constitution vests in the House the "exclusive power to initiate" impeachment. This is not merely a legal authority but a moral vocation for the House to be the nation's conscience. The swiftness with which over one-third of its members endorsed the Articles of Impeachment reflected a collective judgment that the alleged offenses constituted a grave danger to the public trust. This imperative for accountability is a profound moral good. However, the legitimacy of this moral end is inextricably linked to the legitimacy of the means used to achieve it.

B. The End Does Not Justify the Means

The Supreme Court's decision brings to the fore a classic ethical principle that the end does not justify the means. Even if the House's motivations[18] were rooted in an urgent and sincere desire for justice, the pursuit of that end cannot justify violating objective constitutional rules designed to preserve fairness, order, and due process. The judicial vocation is to maintain this order and the integrity of established procedures. It would be a cause for public scandal if rules were violated to satisfy a righteous desire for justice, as this would encourage a disregard for the law whenever intense public

18. It may be inferred that the House's role as the agent of public accountability, by its nature, is often disruptive. It seeks to break through complacency and legalistic quietism to address a perceived moral crisis.

opinion holds sway. This would not only undermine the checks and balances of power but could open the door to mob rule.

C. Balancing Substantive and Procedural Justice

The House's impeachment drive was animated by a cry for substantive justice—a demand to address the "what" of the allegations..[19] The Supreme Court's ruling is a masterpiece of procedural justice, ensuring that the "how" of accountability is fair. A mature ethical perspective understands that these are not opposing values. Procedural justice is not a barrier to, but the necessary and legitimate pathway forward, to achieving substantive justice. When procedure is ignored, any outcome, even if it is substantively correct, is tainted by injustice. The Court's decision, while not absolving the respondent from any of the charges[20], ultimately upholds the principle that true justice cannot be built on a foundation of unjust processes.

D. The Common Good: An Integration of Trust and Law

The two institutions operated not with contradictory views of the common good but with a focus on two essential components of it. The House sought to restore the common good by renewing the people's faith in their leaders, while the Court[21] sought to preserve it by ensuring the stability that flows from the Rule of Law. An integral understanding of *bonum commune*

19. The distinction between procedural and substantive justice is a key theme in legal philosophy. Procedural justice concerns the fairness of the processes used to make decisions, while substantive justice concerns the fairness of the outcomes themselves. While modern legal systems prioritize procedure, a purely procedural approach can sometimes fail to address the underlying substantive injustice, leading to what is often termed a "moral remainder."

20. *Duterte v. House of Representatives*, July 25, 2025, p. 5.

21. It may be viewed that the Court defined the common good as the stability that flows from the "Rule of Just Law," a society where procedures are fair and predictable.

requires both: a government that is trustworthy and a constitutional system that is true to its own laws.

Conclusion: A Discerning Path Forward for the House of the People

The Supreme Court has spoken, and its decision stands as the law of the land. For the House of Representatives, an institution built upon the Constitution to initiate all acts that will hold public officials accountable, acknowledges the decision as an expression of fidelity to the rule of law. This experience should not be seen as a defeat, but as a profound moment of institutional discernment.

The call now is for the House to embrace its vocation with a renewed wisdom, channeling its passion for justice into pathways that are both potent and procedurally sound. This path forward invites every Member to reflect on how the House can exercise its other formidable powers. To be "contemplatives in action[22]" in a legislative context means moving beyond the immediate political firestorm to engage in the patient and diligent work of governance.

This requires leveraging the full spectrum of its oversight powers: from rigorous, evidence-based legislative inquiries that expose wrongdoing in the light of day, to the meticulous scrutiny of the national budget to hold agencies accountable implicated in corruption, and the crafting of landmark legislation that strengthens anti-graft mechanisms and enhances transparency for the future.

22. "Contemplatives in action" is a classic Jesuit maxim, attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola's vision for the Society of Jesus. It describes a spirituality where prayer and reflection are not separate from, but are integrated into, a life of active work and service in the world. For a legislative body, it suggests a mode of operating where passionate action is always guided by deep, principled reflection.

The House of Representatives remains the body closest to the Filipino people; the primary vessel of their sovereign will. Its fundamental mandate to demand accountability from the highest officials of the land remains undiminished. The *kairos* of *Duterte v. House of Representatives* has not extinguished this vocation but has refined it, calling for a form of accountability that is zealous in its pursuit of justice and, at the same time, unwavering in its respect for the rule of law.

READY FOR A THEOLOGY OF THE MIND?
FAITH RESPONSE TO THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Ramil R. Marcos and Phil Nielsen G. Galvez

Introduction

Let us consider some emblematic scenarios encountered by clergy, pastoral workers, and ordinary parishioners in various settings in the Philippines. In a rural parish, before the Consecration at Mass, a barefoot, scantily clothed man approached the altar with hands holding aloft a sharp bolo. The worshippers readied themselves to scamper out of the building. The priest stopped his ritual, met the man calmly at the foot of the altar, and, speaking kindly, convinced him to drop his weapon there. Then he led him courteously to an empty pew to join the community. The priest later learned that the man was a poor farmer from the barrio who had been through a distressing experience he could not handle.

In an affluent city parish, as soon as the priest took his seat at the presider's chair for the start of the Liturgy of the Word, an old lady in her formal dress and wide-brimmed hat ascended the altar and sat beside the priest. She gazed at the people with a smile, nodded approvingly at the readings, and started a small talk with the priest. She took her seat in a pew only after the priest convinced her to do so. The parishioners treated her with respect, aware that this widow had suffered immense loss in the death of loved ones, her husband through sickness, and her daughter through suicide.

It is a running joke among priests that for every parish in the country, expect a mentally troubled person to hang out, if not to beg, then perhaps to create a scene to be noticed. Mentally troubled persons seem to find the ambience at a church a safe and welcoming place where they will not be ostracized, feared, or disdained. While this may not always be the case, depending on the attitude of the priest or the security personnel, many ordinary parishioners express concern and show compassion to such persons.

People with obvious neurotic or psychotic tendencies are easily identifiable when they enter our churches. What goes unnoticed are the many people who go to Mass or to pray in silence with invisible internal emotional or psychological battles. In fact, it is not a "we" and "they" situation when it comes to the present and pervasive plague of mental health issues.[1] No one is considered immune to the experience of psychological weakness or vulnerability. Some people may have full-blown mental illness, but all human beings, theologically speaking, are psychologically wounded by the effects of original sin and by the imperfection attendant to being fragile creatures in need of Christ's redemptive grace.[2]

In tackling the issue of mental health in the church, it is therefore important to include real experiences of struggles and not mere theoretical discussions, creating a distance and promoting a stance of superiority or condescension by

1. Daniel Horan, "Australian Bishops Get It Right on Mental Health," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 28, 2020, https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/faith-seeking-understanding/australian-bishops-get-it-right-mental-health (accessed on May 12, 2023).

2. Bishops of California, "A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of California on Caring for those who Suffer from Mental Illness," *California Catholic Conference website* May 1, 2018, https://cacatholic.org/resources/mental-health/hope-and-healing/ (accessed on May 29, 2024). Hereafter "A Pastoral Letter."

those who do not suffer the same. The mentally afflicted are full members of the Body of Christ. People dealing with such issues are to be found within our faith communities, religious organizations, rectories, monasteries and convents, parochial schools, parish ministries, and among Catholic families, church servers, and leaders and superiors, including priests and bishops.[3] Even the pastors who primarily attend to the needs of their flock know that they are "wounded healers."[4]

This paper intends to explore the exigency and the viability of the church's deeper awareness and involvement in the mental health issues affecting many Filipinos today. The church has well-developed theoretical and pastoral strategies regarding the theology of the body, human dignity, or human solidarity, and we are comfortable in discussing and presenting such themes, as well as formulating programs based on the thoughts and reflections derived from them. But what about a "theology of the mind,"[5] an attempt at finding a balance between the spiritual and practical, between the religious and psychological, between faith and science, at the service of those who suffer invisible torments that affect their relationship with God and with other people, those who hope that through their faith community they can find an answer, and even those whose wounds can be traced back to the church or to their challenging experience of religion? How should the church respond to this challenge?

3. See Mary Farrow, "'I couldn't Fix Myself': Bishop Conley opens up about mental health recovery," *Catholic News Agency* November 14, 2020, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/46589/i-couldnt-fix-myself-bishop-conley-opens-up-about-mental-health-recovery (accessed on June 1, 2024).

4. Bishops of California, "A Pastoral Letter."

5. Mary Rezac, "Lessons Learned About Catholics with Mental Health Struggles," *Catholic News Agency* July 11, 2016, https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2016/07/lessons-learned-catholics-mental-health-struggles (accessed on May 13, 2024).

Mental Health Situation in the Philippines

In these past few years, one of the most effective disseminators of the plight of the mentally ill and the general situation of mental health in the country is a television program that features the existential dilemma of those grappling with mental illness and the families that improvise drastic and unconventional remedies in their desire to alleviate the pain of their loved ones. Since the program is followed by many people nationwide on television, and worldwide on an online video platform, its videos reveal the extent of ignorance and poverty and the culture of shame, fear, and taboo that characterize the normal Filipino responses to the escalating incidence of mental health cases and that militate against a proper way of addressing this problem. The following examples recount two stories broadcast in the program.

In its June 26, 2022 episode, *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho* (*KMJS*) recounted the story of "Miguel," from Quezon province.[6] At the age of twenty-three, the man has been living alone in his grandmother's abandoned and dilapidated house. He was not only confined to this place since the age of fifteen, but also shackled by heavy metal chains on his ankle. It all began when the youth exhibited violent behavior, endangering the safety of his family and neighbors and harming himself during violent mood swings. His mother, the only one able to care for him, quickly moves out of harm's way when, after having been fed or bathed, Miguel reciprocates with curses, blows, and kicks.

Returning home from a labor contract in a cornfield, Miguel showed excessive fear of being killed by imaginary assailants. From this paranoia, Miguel's condition led to more

6. Jessica Soho, "Lalaking Walong Taon Nang Nakakadena, May Pag-asa Pa Kayang Makalaya?," *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho*, *GMA Public Affairs*, (June 26, 2022), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_dvciqF5Jg (accessed on May 13, 2024). Henceforth KMJS Video 1.

hallucinations and aggression. Being a threat to others, his family decided to restrain and chain him like an animal. Due to their poverty and ignorance, Miguel was never clinically diagnosed, although it was widely believed that his situation stemmed from drug abuse. When, finally, through exposure on the television show, Miguel was released from his rusty metal chains and examined, the doctors discovered that Miguel was suffering from malnutrition, schizophrenia, hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized behavior.

On October 27, 2023, the show featured the experiences of a 71-year-old father and his 22-year-old daughter, "Angela," from Lupon, Davao Oriental.[7] Angela is the only child of the poor farmer Rosalino and his now deceased wife. At the age of two, Angela began to show unusual hyperactivity that endangered her safety, a lack of comprehension, and an inability to learn. The parents decided to tie her foot with a cloth and imprison her in a tiny room to prevent her from wandering away. Like "Miguel," she was only seen by doctors after she was rescued from her confinement following the airing of her story, twenty years after she was initially bound and hidden. Doctors found that she has intellectual disability, malnutrition, and seizure disorders.

Both "Miguel" and "Angela" could not, by now, be sufficiently treated in the local hospitals, as their advanced psychiatric conditions needed referral to higher mental institutions. However, these institutions, too costly and too far from home, are not within the reach of many ordinary Filipinos who struggle economically and socially.

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7. Jessica Soho, "Babae, Mahigit 2 Dekada Nang Iginapos Ng Sarili Niyang Ama," *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho*, *GMA Public Affairs* (October 17, 2023), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWgLd5lzyQE (accessed on May 13, 2024).

These media exposés on "Miguel" and "Angela" vividly convey the situation of the majority of those with mental maladies, especially from the remote areas. And while these examples typify the acute cases, there are untold stories of the less noticeable ordeals of those with "depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, or borderline personality disorder,"[8] the ailments that form part of a long list of mental health aberrations.[9]

The Department of Health (DOH) estimates that about 3.6 million people are afflicted with mental, neurological, and substance use disorders, for whom services in the Philippines are limited and unequal due to cultural or sociological factors and a lack of available resources and facilities.[10] There is very little accurate and updated epidemiological data on mental health disorders in the country.[11] However, some important data have been sourced through the support of the World Health Organization (WHO). A consistent increase in suicide rates, higher in males than in females, has been noted in the past years' surveys by both private researchers and government agencies.[12] It is not the goal of this paper to delve into the

8. Anna Weaver, "How Catholics Struggle with Mental Illness," *US Catholic website,* January 11, 2010, https://uscatholic.org/articles/201001/through-a-glass-darkly-how-catholics-struggle-with-mental-illness/ (accessed on May 12, 2024).

9. "Alphabetical List of Mental Disorders," *National Health Center of America* (no date), https://mentalhealthcenter.com/alphabetical-list-of-mental-disorders/ (accessed on June 13, 2024).

10. "Mental Health Crisis a Rising Epidemic in PH' – Experts," *Philippine News Agency* October 9, 2023, https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1211404 (accessed on May 31, 2024).

11. John Lally, John Tully, et al., "Mental Health Services in the Philippines," *BJPsych International*, vol. 16 no.3 (August 2019), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6646847/ (accessed on May 31, 2024).

12. Ibid.

alarming statistics of this phenomenon, which can be easily found in veritable medical research.

The executive summary of a recent WHO report will give a global picture of the national situation.[13] The general situation describes the state of the national government's mental health awareness, efforts, and actions. These include the following observations: "Mental health represents an estimated 2.65% of the health budget in the Philippines, but most of the funds are used to sustain long-stay psychiatric hospitals; 60% of primary care clinic patients have at least one mental, neurological and/or substance use condition; for every 200,000 people in the Philippines there is only one psychiatrist and one psychiatric nurse to provide professional mental health care. There is only one psychologist per every one million people; the Philippines supports four large psychiatric hospitals, 46 psychiatric inpatient units, and 29 outpatient mental health facilities; 69% of Local Government Units (LGUs) have trained health providers in WHO mhGAP; and 14% of the LGUs have trained sta on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) disaster preparedness."[14]

While the report acknowledged strong points in the government's program for mental health, like having a national legislation, strong political will for implementation, the training of workforce, and the existence of a public information system coupled with data collection and analysis, even greater challenges were also noted. The challenges were identified as: "low help-seeking behavior by people experiencing mental health conditions given high stigma and misunderstanding; lack of

13. "Philippines: WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health," *World Health Organization* 2022, https://www.who.int/initiatives/who-special-initiative-for-mental-health/philippines (accessed on May 31, 2024).

14. Ibid.

insurance coverage for mental health outpatient services; lack of mental health specialists in provinces to supervise mental health being managed through in primary health care services; and 20,000+ primary health care facilities managed through 2,590 district health bureaus in the Philippines (which) makes the assurance of quality of services and equitable resources particularly challenging."[15]

Dr. Joan Mae Rifareal, a fellow at the Philippine Psychiatric Association, said there are only about 500-600 board-certified psychiatrists in the country. At the same time, the World Health Organization recommends ten professionals for every 100,000 people. Furthermore, there is a lack of mental health facilities, and hospitals are very costly. While low-risk conditions can be treated in hospitals, there are not enough institutions for the medium or high-risk cases.[16]

A life coach and mental health advocate, Dulce Marie Saret, shared another crucial factor in mental health deficiencies in the Philippines, compounding the economic and institutional difficulties already mentioned. It has to do with the stigma around mental health, which, though universally prevalent, is exacerbated by Filipino cultural mores.[17] Sufferers are ridiculed and bullied by jokes and mean comments. Others are chided for excessive emotionality and encouraged to put up a strong façade, pray hard, and solve their problems alone. And families of those who go through mental issues consider it a shame to publicly acknowledge a relative's illness, fearing the loss of honor in the community. All these contribute to the ongoing

15. Ibid.

16. KMJS Video 1.

17. Dulce Marie Saret, "Mental Health and Toxic Filipino Culture," *Rappler*, October 30, 2023, https://www.rappler.com/voices/ispeak/opinion-mental-health-toxic-filipino-culture/ (accessed on May 31, 2024).

misperception and insensitivity that plague our society's attitudes and approaches to the phenomenon of mental health today. A lingering and imposing stigma overruns the open and urgent search for mental health treatment and healing.

In today's Filipino society, through conventional and social media, frank and honest conversations on mental health are happening, thanks to the initiative of institutions, advocacy groups, and enlightened individuals. However, the crucial task is to continue pursuing optimistic views and vigorous programs that address the insufficiency of facilities and personnel, the high cost of treatment, and the negative impact of cultural pressures.

Church Teachings on Mental Health

The Catholic Church has an outstanding historical reputation for compassion, concern, and care for the sick at every time and place. It stems from the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry and mission to his disciples (Mt 4:23 and Mt 10:1),[18] which blossomed into an expression of concrete spirituality and pastoral ministry through the centuries. In our time, the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church situates the solicitude for health care as part of the demand for the promotion of respect, integrity, and fundamental rights of all people.

The Compendium states: "These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health

18. See also Bishops of California, "A Pastoral Letter," no. 1.

care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom."[19]

Upholding the plight of the poor and the marginalized, the Church proposes the principle of the universal destination of goods, affirming within this context the primacy of the preferential option for the poor. This exercise of Christian charity and the assumption of social responsibility, "cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without health care, and, above all, those without hope of a better future."[20]

Scriptures and Mental Health

Focusing on the theme of mental health, a return to the Biblical font promises to be a great resource in identifying human feelings, emotional turmoil, pronounced anxiety, and even depressive and suicidal tendencies of major personages who encountered God in their troubled state and to whom God, in turn, manifested prodigious patience, sympathy, love, and healing.[21] It all started with Jacob, who wrestled with an angel of the Lord (Gen 32:22-32). After struggling with this mysterious creature through the night, the angel christened him Israel, which means, "he struggled with God." He thus became the patriarch, the father of a people who would continue the

19. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace," Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church," *Vatican Archives*, 2004, no. 166, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html (accessed on May 1, 2024). Henceforth "Compendium of Social Doctrine."

20. Ibid., no. 182.

21. Marcia Webb, "Toward a Theology of Mental Illness," *Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health*, Vol. 16 (2012): 21ff., file:///Users/fr.ramilmarcos/Downloads/2009.04.16_Weter_Lecture_Webb.pdf (accessed on May 13, 2024). This paper consulted the downloadable pdf version for the Biblical personages and mental health.

struggle with God, with humanity, and with self, and like their patriarch, would overcome.[22]

The prophet Elijah, threatened by the evil queen Jezebel, ran for his life, experiencing not only fear but also despair. In deep sorrow, he asked God that he might die (1 Kgs 19:4). But the Lord instead provided him with food and encouraged him greatly. The prophet Jonah, who was reluctant to preach to the rebellious Ninevites and was resentful and uncomprehending of God's relinquishment of his wrath against this sinful nation, asked God to end his life (Jon. 4:4).

Naomi, a widowed Israelite left in a foreign land, labels herself "Mara," which means bitter, as she could not fathom the emptiness and calamities the Lord God allowed her to experience (Ruth 1:19-21). On top of all these is the image of Job, whose distressful experiences of loss, sickness, and verbal abuse by his friends, experienced psychological turmoil and had likewise wished for death (Job 10:18-19). It was in crying out to the Lord, however, that Job experienced God in a transcendent way and became far more blessed in the end.[23] These examples from the Old Testament do not provide a diagnostic case manual of mental health issues. Still, they show that God is aware of the interior suffering of his people and that he does not abandon them in their misery.

In the New Testament, as Paul enunciates, evidence of psychological despondency and struggle continue with the disciples. Feeling afflicted and crushed by his own and his companions' experiences during their voyage in Asia, the great apostle wrote about "despairing of life itself" (2 Cor 1:8-9) and was rescued only from this pit of hopelessness when they

22. Ibid.

23. Mark Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will* (Chicago, Loyola Press, 2010), p. 100.

surrendered to God and asked the help of the prayers of fellow Christians.

All the onus of psychological strain, stress, and distress encountered by God's people find its zenith in the life of the God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, prophesied to be "a man of sorrows" (Is 53:3). Not only did the Lord Jesus assume our humanity and all its vulnerabilities which he shared in – temptations, sorrows, grief, loss, fear, and anger. He also endured doubts about his mental soundness, as when his relatives suspected him of being crazy (Mk 3:21), and the Jews declared him mad or possessed (Mk 3:22; Jn 10:19-20). He experienced intense anguish in Gethsemane (Lk 22:44) and he felt despondency and abandonment on the cross (Mt 27:46). We can say that "Jesus is God, then, sympathizing with the human condition from the inside."[24]

In his moment of emotional pain, the Lord Jesus did not hesitate to turn to his friends for consolation (Mt 26:38). In his most vulnerable and weakest moment physically and mentally on the way to his Crucifixion, the Lord did not refuse the help of another person, as he allowed himself to rely on Simon of Cyrene who assisted him with the heavy cross.[25]

In his ministry, Jesus not only healed the sick's bodies but also calmed the raging interior storms and the unseen turmoil within people's hearts.[26] Thus did he return the dignity of a woman racked with guilt (Jn 8:10-11), consoled a widowed

24. Anthony Fisher, "Religion and Mental Health," *Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney*, December 8, 2019, no. 4, https://www.sydneycatholic.org/addresses-and-statements/2019/religion-and-mental-health-perth2019/ (accessed on May 12, 2024).

25. Daniel Imwalle, "Catholic Response to Mental Health Crisis," *St. Anthony Messenger*, May 2021, https://www.franciscanmedia.org/st-anthony-messenger/may-2021/a-catholic-response-to-the-mental-health-crisis/ (accessed on May 28, 2024).

26. Fisher, "Religion and Mental Health," no. 4.

mother at the loss of her only son (Lk 7:13), assured an anxious centurion of his servant's healing (Lk 7:2-10), and acquiesced to a worried father's request for his dying son (Jn 4:46-54). Jesus assured lepers of a place in society (Lk 5:14) and transformed a self-harming demoniac into a man "clothed and in his right mind" (Mk 5:1-15). He proclaimed a mission of setting the oppressed free (Lk 4:18-19) and of healing every kind of sickness (see Lk 4 and Mt 8), including emotional and psychological ones.

Most importantly, the Lord Jesus made a countercultural claim in defiance of the common belief of the people (Jn 9:2). He declared that sicknesses were neither always our fault nor were they punishment for personal sins or for the wrongdoings of one's family (Jn 9:3). Jesus introduced the face of the God who does not delight in punishing but rejoices in creating, sustaining and caring for people with unconditional love because they were created in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26). For Jesus, God was not a law to be obeyed but a gracious presence who invites his children to a loving relationship, to a holy fear and not a blind, legalistic one.[27]

The Magisterium and Mental Health

The Church, through the universal magisterium of recent popes and through the efforts of some bishops or groups of bishops, has issued declarations of support for people battling mental illness, for the attention due to them, and for those who provide them with medical, therapeutic, and personal care. In 1996, St. Pope John Paul II, addressing the participants of an international conference for the pastoral assistance of health care workers answered the question often posed regarding mental health patients. He said: "Thus the response to the

27. Ronald Rolheiser, *Wresting with God: Finding Hope and Meaning in Our Daily Struggles to Be Human* (New York: Image Books), 2018, p. 73.

theme's question is clear: whoever suffers from mental illness 'always' bears God's image and likeness in himself, as does every human being. In addition, he 'always' has the inalienable right not only to be considered as an image of God and therefore as a person, but also to be treated as such."[28]

He asserted that there must be no fear of helping such people but responding actively to their situation should be considered a duty. For they are the poor referred to in the Gospel, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs (Mt 5:3). Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ did not only commiserate with and heal the sick, but also identified himself with all of them (Mt 25:36). In taking on himself all human suffering, the Lord Jesus also embraced mental afflictions. Thus, though difficult to imagine, the mentally ill, like all the sick, are configured to Christ and share in his redemptive suffering for humanity.[29]

Pope Benedict XVI dedicated his message for the 14th World Day of the Sick in 2006 specifically to people who experience mental disturbance, acknowledging this as a growing phenomenon that afflicts one-fifth of humanity and is becoming a real worldwide emergency.[30] The Pope identified the situations that exacerbate the plight of the mentally ill, including the prevalent loneliness, the breakdown in traditional sources of social support, and the tendency to marginalize the weak members of society. Even as he encouraged health care workers to ensure

28. Pope John Paul II, 1996, "Mentally Ill Are Also Made in God's Image," *EWTN*, December 11, 1986, no. 8, https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/mentally-ill-are-also-made-in-gods-image-8863 (accessed on May 1, 2024).

29. Ibid. no. 7.

30. Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 14th World Day of the Sick*, Vatican Archives, December 8, 2005, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/messages/sick/documents/hf_benxvi_mes_20051208_world-day-of-the-sick-2006.html (accessed on June 2, 2024).

continuing care for the mentally ill, he lamented the lack or inadequacy of attention given to these people in many parts of the world, due to financial and manpower constraints and negative social regard for the sick.

It is perhaps the late Pope Francis, who positions awareness and a sense of urgency for the church's involvement in mental health to the level of both a pastoral and personal endorsement. The bishops of California quote him in their joint statement: "I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life... Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else—God is in this person's life... Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow."[31]

Calling attention to young people with mental health struggles, Pope Francis wrote in his 2019 post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the youth: "The desire to live fully and experience new things is also felt by many young people with physical, mental and sensory disabilities. Even though they may not always be able to have the same experiences as others, they possess amazing resources and abilities that are often far above average. The Lord Jesus grants them other gifts, which the community is called to recognize and appreciate, so that they can discover his plan of love for each of them."[32] The youth who grapple with physical or psychological resilience desire to live like the rest, endowed with potential but in need of recognition and support.

But perhaps the most compelling evidence of Pope Francis' support for mental health advocacy was his repeated admission

31. Bishops of California, "A Pastoral Letter," no. 1.

32. Pope Francis, *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit*, *Vatican Archives* March 25, 2019 149, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html (accessed on May 31, 2024).

in various interviews that he, too, needed psychological assistance and that, in fact, he once sought to acquire it with the help of a medical expert.[33] As a Jesuit provincial in Argentina, therapy aided him against serious bouts with anxiety and stress, and in checking his impulsiveness in making decisions.

The Pope stressed the importance of priests gaining knowledge of psychological processes to help them address the concerns of the people they serve. While some priests acquire this familiarity through experience, he still recommends that they exert some effort in trying to study this science.[34] While the Pope encourages church personnel to be familiar with psychological processes for service, he is aware that some need this intervention for the purpose of self-care, as he did in the past.

In fact, many priests today need guidance and help from medical experts when they, too, succumb to the pitfalls of mental health struggles. In some countries, the church has noted an alarming trend of suicides among the clergy.[35] In the Philippines, such occurrences do happen. Still, they are not openly discussed due to cultural sensitivities and the customary practice of ecclesiastical secrecy, even though some news

33. Courtney Mares, "Pope Francis Says seeing a psychiatrist helped him with anxiety when he was younger, *Catholic News Agency,* February 27, 2021, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/246651/pope-francis-says-seeing-a-psychiatrist-helped-him-with-anxiety-when-he-was-younger (accessed on May 1, 2024).

34. Ibid.

35. "The Problem of Suicide Among the Catholic Clergy: Alarm Raised Given the Increase in Some Countries," *Zenit,* July 3, 2023, https://zenit.org/2023/07/03/the-problem-of-suicide-among-the-catholic-clergy-alarm-raised-given-the-increase-in-some-countries/ (accessed on May 1, 2024). Henceforth, "The Problem of Suicide Among the Clergy."

agencies report on these events with suspicion.[36] In 2024, Pope Francis spoke of his concern for the effective accompaniment to be given to priests themselves, for many are beginning to feel the pangs of loneliness and the loss of a sense of belonging in their personal life and pastoral mission. He called for a network of fraternal relations crucial in the ongoing formation and care of the clergy.[37] Under the burden of loneliness, fatigue, burnout, stress, and psycho-emotional fragilities, priests, too, weep.[38] The same challenge is felt among other church servants, including consecrated women.[39]

Under Pope Francis' watch, the document *Dignitas Infinita*, from the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith, spoke against prevailing trends that transgress the dignity of the human person. Speaking of concrete instances of violations of human

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36. See "Bicol Seminary Rector Found Dead," *GMA News Online*, July 30, 2010, https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/regions/197360/bicol-seminary-rector-found-dead/story/ (accessed on June 4, 2024); see also "Catholic Priest Found Dead in His Room, Due to Gunshots," *Agenzia Fides*, November 9, 2020, https://www.fides.org/en/news/68610ASIA_PHILIPPINES_Catholic_priest_found_dead_in_his_room_due_to_gunshots (accessed on June 4, 2024); see also "Priest Hangs Self in Church," *Pressreader* (August 30, 2020),https://www.pressreader.com/philippines/tempo-9gc1/20200830/281513638541264, (accessed on June 4, 2024).

37. Pope Francis Discusses Ongoing Formation of Priests, Vocation Promotion and Permanent Diaconate, *Zenit*, June 6, 2024, https://zenit.org/2024/06/06/pope-francis-discusses-ongoing-formation-of-priests-vocation-promotion-and-permanent-diaconate/ (accessed on June 13, 2024).

38. "The Problem of Suicide Among the Clergy" ; See also this incisive analysis: Giovanni Cucci, "Solitudine e Disagio Del Prete: Un Problema Strutturale?," *La Civilta Cattolica*, June 7, 2023, https://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articolo/solitudine-e-disagio-del-prete-un-problema-strutturale/ (accessed on June 13, 2024).

39. Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, "Without faith, I Would Have Ended My Life: A Nun's Journey Through Depression," *Inquirer.net*, October 1, 2019, https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/347156/without-faith-i-would-have-ended-my-life-a-nuns-journey-through-depression/ (accessed on June 4, 2024).

dignity, the document included instances of marginalization of those who endure conditions of impairment or disability. Thus, it called for the protection of people with physical or mental limitations from the effects of the "throw-away culture" that considers individuals with disabilities as societal rejects. The document clearly embodies the papal advocacy for the inclusion of all, especially the most vulnerable, in the life of both the society and the church. No human imperfection can erase the dignity willed and loved by God for every human person.[40]

Among the collective body of bishops, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) undertook a noteworthy and laudable step by publishing in 2021 the document "To Live Life to the Full: Mental Health in Australia Today," in which they encouraged churches, governments, and all people to make mental health a priority.[41] Not only was it opportune at the time of the worldwide pandemic, but the document was also a trailblazer on many fronts.

The eminent theologian Daniel Horan described the fine features of the document.[42] He observed how the bishops adopted a stance of directness, honesty, and humility. They distanced themselves from the common "we" and "they" language used when dealing with the sick.[43] They also included

40. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dignitas Infinita on Human Dignity, Vatican Archives*, March 3, 2024, no. 53 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html (accessed on March 19, 2024).

41. Mark Coleridge, "Foreword," in *To Live Life to the Full*, *Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Statement*, 2020-2021, https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Social-Justice-Statement-2020-WEB.pdf (accessed on June 2, 2024), p. 2. Henceforth, the document will be referred to as Australian Bishops Statement.

42. Horan, "Australian Bishops Get It Right on Mental Health."

43. Australian Bishops' Statement, p. 8.

personal testimonies of the mentally challenged. They engaged with the medical and scientific sectors in trying to find a pastoral solution to the problem. They went to great lengths to assure patients that their situation does not originate from moral failure, lack of faith, or weak resolve. The bishops also listened to young people as they shared the pressures they felt in living with real issues of mental health, drugs, stress in school, alcohol, and body image.[44]

Comparing this initiative with those of the American episcopate, Horan bemoaned the Americans' seeming indifference to this societal menace as a national college of bishops. In America, though, a few steps have been taken by individual bishops in their own locality,[45] and by some groups of bishops in their own regions, such as the joint pastoral statements in California[46] and New York.[47]

The Philippine Church and Mental Health

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has not published a pastoral letter or formal statement detailing the hierarchy's strategy in tackling the mental health challenge, reflective of this topic's minor status among the pressing concerns of the local church, following the argument

44. Australian Bishops Statement, p, 4ff.

45. James Conley, "A Future with Hope," *Diocese of Lincoln* May 2024, https://www.lincolndiocese.org/all-documents/statements/2331-bishop-conley-mental-health-pastoral-letter/file (accessed on June 18, 2024). This is a very personal and moving pastoral letter of Bishop Conley, detailing his own path to mental health wellness after his personal struggle with mental health issues. It was released in May 2024, to celebrate the month dedicated to Mental Health.

46. Bishops of California, "A Pastoral Letter."

47. "For I am lonely and afflicted," *New York State Catholic Conference*, 2014, https://www.nyscatholic.org/posts/for-i-am-lonely-and-afflicted (accessed on June 2, 2024).

of Daniel Horan above.[48] Statements regarding the subject come from the Episcopal Commission on Health Care (EPHC), given through interviews and press releases. The Commission has made repeated declarations of the bishops' concern for the mental health situation in the country.[49] It called for the establishment of diocesan and parish centers to help sufferers, with the necessary training of volunteers for primary counseling (especially in rural areas), assessment, and referral of individual cases to specialized health practitioners.[50]

The Commission has emphasized the importance of spirituality in response to the crisis,[51] maintaining that the clergy are in touch with the people's reality.[52] It said that the bishops recommend that parents reach out to parish priests in the event of their children's depression.[53]

This rather simplistic approach is countered by the experiences of people immersed in mental health crusades, as a

48. Horan, "Australian Bishops Get It Right on Mental Health."

49. "Church Official Seeks Stronger Action on Looming Mental Health 'Pandemic,'" *CBCP News*, February 11, 2021, https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/church-official-seeks-stronger-action-on-looming-mental-health-pandemic/ (accessed on June 14, 2024); also Joseph Peter Calleja, "Catholic Bishops Tackle Rising Suicides in Philippines," *UCA News*, June 15, 2020, https://www.ucanews.com/news/catholic-bishops-tackle-rising-suicides-in-philippines/97667 (accessed on June 13, 2024).

50. Marielle Lucenio, "Philippine Catholic Church Official Calls for 'Collective Help' to Address Mental Health," *LICAS News*, July 15, 2020, https://philippines.licas.news/2020/07/15/philippine-catholic-church-official-calls-for-collective-help-to-address-mental-health/ (accessed on June 13, 2024).

51. Luis Angelo Sta. Maria, "CBCP Commission on Health Care Focuses on Spirituality in Addressing Mental Health Challenges," *The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Manila,* September 14, 2023, https://rcam.org/8115-2/ (accessed on June 13, 2024).

52. Calleja, "Catholic Bishops Tackle Rising Suicides in Philippines,".

53. Ibid.

Filipina actress and mother who lost her daughter to depression and suicide said in a documentary: "It is important that those who experience depression or anxiety to understand this malady. It is not treated simply by watching a funny film or by going to a priest. It cannot be simply cured by prayer because it is a sickness of the mind."[54] While most professionals accept a holistic approach, and faith or spirituality is recognized as a factor in healing, caution must be taken not to give the impression that the problem of mental health can be spiritualized or its treatment attributed primarily to faith.

The Commission's social media presence (Facebook) shows that among its manifold activities, it actively conducts a Mental Health Conference and Mental Health First-Aid Training in the dioceses.[55] However, there is no data available on social media on the frequency of the activity, on how many dioceses have welcomed it, or what projects were implemented on the ground after the conduct of the talks and trainings.

And despite the assurance of the Commission head of the Philippine bishops' collective support for mental health advocacy, only one diocese has an actual existing diocesan program for mental health, a fact that attracted international church media attention.[56] What started as a phone-in counselling

54. Shamaine Buencamino in Video, "Invisible (Full Documentary)," *ABS CBN,* May 27, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWYQlmqsxZY&list=WL&index=56&t=1928s (accessed on June 13, 2024). The statement is here translated into English from its original Tagalog delivery.

55. CBCP Commission on Health Care, *Facebook Page*, https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064595473629 (accessed on June 1, 2024).

56. Robin Gomes, "Philippine Diocese Creates Mental Health 'Hopeline,'" *Vatican News*, 4 July 2020, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-07/philippines-kalookan-diocese-covid-hopeline-mental-health-david.html (accessed on June 2, 2024).

service in the Philippine Diocese of Kalookan to help alleviate the feeling of isolation during the Covid pandemic lockdowns, the "Covid-Hopeline" has grown into the "Task Force *Salubong* (Encounter)," offering among other things, counselling, trauma therapy, and training for basic counseling, not only to mental health sufferers but also to rehabilitated drug users, families of extra-judicial killing victims, and the poor in the community.[57] The diocese's website provides details of the program, the brainchild of its bishop, the Most Rev. Pablo Virgilio David.

From the Catholic academe, a scholarly paper written by the University of Santo Tomas researchers, titled "A Proposed Pastoral Approach to Address the Surge in Suicide Cases in the Philippines During the COVID-19 Pandemic" was published in the Journal of Religion and Health, a Quartile 1 Scopus-indexed journal under Springer.[58] While professors Ivan Efreaim Gozum and Joselito Gutierrez centered on the study of suicide cases and only within the period of the pandemic, their proposals can offer fruitful considerations for church leaders and institutions contemplating a solid program for mental health assistance in general. The paper's conclusions can forge a healthy faith and science alliance in combatting this growing phenomenon by encouraging a collaborative relationship between church personnel and medical professionals.

57. see *Diocese of Kalookan website*: https://dioceseofkalookan.ph/ova_sev/salubong-rehabilitation-program-for-drug-defendents/ (accessed on June 2, 2024).

58. "How Church Responds to Spike in Suicide Cases During the Pandemic Spotlighted in New Scopus Publication," *University of Santo Tomas*, September 6, 2023, https://www.ust.edu.ph/how-church-responds-to-spike-in-suicide-cases-during-the-pandemic-spotlighted-in-new-scopus-publication/ (accessed on June 2, 2024).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In view of the preceding focus on the urgency of the mental health crisis globally and locally, the examples from the Scriptures, and the contemporary reflections of key church personalities on this topic, the following concluding reflections hope to modestly provide an impulse for the Catholic Church in the Philippines as it considers its contribution in confronting this important issue. Grappling for a meaningful response to this societal pressing challenge, these last words hope to impart seeds for a continuing attempt to formulate a practical theology of the mind or of mental health.

Show the Compassion of Jesus

A major stumbling block in the treatment of mental health in the Philippines, aside from the socio-economic factors, is the cultural factor that is at the root of stigmatization. Filipinos live under a shame culture,[59] and shame descends on the imbalanced person who seems to be missing a mental ingredient.[60] People with mental health problems have long been bullied and ridiculed. Owing to ignorance, people consider them crazy, nervous wrecks, or just plain dramatic, and this was often indicated with the accompanying gesture of rotating the index finger around the ear or temple, signifying loss of orientation or ability. Families with members who have body-mind disharmony fear ostracism or dread losing their good name. Thus, the mentally disturbed member is not a source of pride, and if possible, should be hidden from sight.

The Church can improve people's perception of mental health by making mental health awareness part of its ministry

59. Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1975), p. 77.

60. Ibid., pp. 214-215.

of proclamation, which is a very influential tool for personal and social change. Not only is God's Word replete with examples of compassion and care for the sick, but the Scriptures can be found illustrations of very real emotional and psychological tragedies involving God's chosen ones. The Lord Jesus gravitated towards those tormented in mind and spirit and worked to liberate them. If preachers and teachers of the Word take time to educate themselves with the basics of mental health, they can liberate the uncomprehending and misinformed about the nature of this sickness from their indifference, aversion, and fear.

It is not enough to tolerate the mentally ill person to loiter in the church or in the patio, or to give him or her alms or food. Through the church's ministry of teaching, the summons to consider the sick with respect, tenderness, and concern can become part of the ethos of the community. Instead of ridicule, the church can arouse the attitude of respect; instead of shaming, understanding; instead of avoidance, acceptance; instead of pity, concrete action for the healing and recovery of the mental sufferer. In our beginning stories, the priest who calmly approached the bolo-wielding farmer at Mass and the priest who treated the troubled widow with respect showed great examples for their congregation to follow. The mentally ill deserve to be treated with dignity as children of God.

Church leaders and workers can also start by being comfortable with their own struggles or experiences found in their families or circle of friends. A priest used to speak to his parishioners about his father's suicide, to the consternation of sensitive listeners. But in doing so, he identified with families that bore the stigma of similar tragedy. In Bible or faith sharing, ecclesial movements can encourage a deeper view of holiness and wholeness that encompasses the entire

person, not focusing solely on heavenly, spiritual, and abstract themes, but on the actual daily challenges people confront. Church fellowships can be real occasions when brokenness and vulnerabilities are seen as possibilities rather than as a *cul de sac*.

Even among Filipino clergy and religious, there is a hesitation or embarrassment in admitting their own need for emotional or psychological support. Some even fear being associated with a center that provides renewal and therapeutic programs that, in their view, make them appear hopeless cases or damaged goods.[61] It must be deeply consoling for lay people to hear priests share not only that they go to spiritual direction, but that they also meet with a counselor or therapist for their own well-being.

The Lord Jesus manifested his solidarity with humanity not only when he assumed human flesh, but also when he identified with the frailties of this imperfect nature. While the church cannot directly alter the socio-economic status of people, it can change perspectives and ways of viewing things. If the church can say to those with mental health battles, "It is good that you exist," then Catholics will respond to their afflicted brothers and sisters more compassionately.[62]

Proclaim the Healing Power of Jesus

Filipinos put a high premium on aspirations for and experiences of the power of divine healing. Though with high respect

61. See short description of the center that provides the programs here: Ivan Coelho, "Galilee Center, Tagaytay," *Musing*, November 16, 2016, http://ivocoelho.blogspot.com/2016/11/galilee-center-tagaytay.html (accessed on June 21, 2024).

62. Maggie Scotch Musso, "A Catholic Approach to Supporting Persons with Mental Illness," *McGrath Institute for Church Life*, October 6, 2020, https://mcgrathblog.nd.edu/a-catholic-approach-to-supporting-persons-with-mental-illness (accessed on May 27, 2024).

for doctors, many, especially the poor, consult herbalists, traditional doctors, and faith healers.[63] Not a few Catholics still bring their health concerns to church by doing novenas, making vows, and lighting candles. And these practices may be a good place to start. Advanced psychological insights now incorporate spiritual well-being among the effective pillars of mental health, and an increasing number of therapists are using a combined approach of faith-infused mental health techniques that resonate "with individuals for whom spirituality is interconnected with their mental well-being."[64]

The Catholic faith declares that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Divine Physician whose power continues to work in the world today through the church.[65] Like the first Christians, Filipino Catholics believe in the power of the Spirit to restore wholeness through faith, prayer, sacraments, and sacramentals. This explains the popularity of healing priests, healing Masses and healing services, healing prayer, healing oil, blessed cloths, and saints' relics.

Healing plays a crucial part in the teaching on the Kingdom of God.[66] It is a sign of the reign of God when the sick are healed and the dead are raised up. The Kingdom Jesus preached is a bringer and sustainer of hope that results in the healing of body and soul. Many of those who suffer mentally are on the brink of losing hope, which explains the rising incidence of both attempted and successful suicides. It is an imperative for the church today to disseminate hope in the minds and hearts

63. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, p. 218.

64. Imwalle, "Catholic Response to Mental Health Crisis."

65. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994), nos. 1503-1505.

66. See Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 12ff.

of people. To do this, the church must enable people to embrace hope and discern between true and false hope.

True hope in the healing power of Jesus is trust in the power of God working through the natural means he provides. Thus, healing need not always be spectacularly supernatural in the biblical sense. A holistic healing perspective admits the importance of the physiological, psychological, and spiritual components that work together towards wellness. The church needs to assure people that it is not wrong to seek professional help for their physical and mental ailments, while continuing to deepen their faith in God, in themselves, and in the goodness of humanity.

Not a few Catholics today have developed a fascination with the growing ministry of exorcism in the church. While it is a valid and necessary ministry, not all problems are ostensibly attributable to evil spirits. Mentally ill people must not be dismissed as cursed, possessed, or enslaved by evil spirits, as untrained, pietistic, and reactionary minds may tend to do. With the popularity of exorcists today, there are reports made through informal interviews in this research that, in a few isolated instances in religious communities or houses of formation, mental disturbances are remedied by deliverance prayers rather than referral for psychological evaluation. Thankfully, competent, well-trained, and authorized Catholic exorcists can easily determine if the cases referred to them are better treated in hospitals.

True hope in the healing power of Jesus also involves faith in the gradual life processes that God instilled in the world. Scriptures speak of "hoping against hope" (Rom 4:18), which implies that this process requires patience and trust. Mental illness requires time and effort on the path to recovery. The church must clarify that faith is not a quick fix, and certainly

not an escape or shortcut from the demands of total healing. Some young Catholics with mental health troubles think that applying to seminaries and religious congregations will solve their problems, only to find out the contrary.

Like developing a life of prayer and spirituality, medical or therapeutic supervision demands patience and surrender. A genuine spiritual life takes a long time to achieve. A holistic wellness follows the same path. Thus, we must believe that God acts indirectly through the instrumentality of professional healers, who must labor through a protracted period before declaring treatment has been achieved. And like spiritual conversion, healing from the emotional or psychological trauma necessitates a lifelong and resolute journey.

In leading people to a true sense of hope in the healing power of God, the church can make positive use of its prayers and rituals, carefully avoiding the pitfalls of superstitions or fatalism. Perhaps special healing Masses, anointing services, and special prayers can be adapted for mental health patients. These powerful spiritual actions can accompany persons while they seek help from trained experts. These blessings and prayers can enable those dealing with mental health issues to derive courage and perseverance in their quest for total healing, enlivening their sense of hope and will to live. Filipinos come to the church for healing; it is the task of the church to educate them in the true meaning and practice of divine healing.

Continue the Healing Presence of Jesus

Without doubt, the church can assist those with mental problems in tandem with other valid approaches. Priests and parishioners do not need to be professional counselors or licensed psychiatrists to support Catholics and other people

who have mental illness. The keyword for the church's contribution is accompaniment, a theological concept that, owing its biblical root in the evangelizing action of the Lord Jesus Christ, is now used as a tool for the pastoral care of families, married couples, and the youth.[67]

Many of those who suffer mentally are also people who have no family, friends, or any other groups to rely on a support system. The church's key role in their recovery will be to provide an anchor of hope as they find solution, receive proper attention, and move through the therapy process.[68]

Deacon Tom Lambert explains why the church must participate in this journey. First, these struggling people are in our own homes, Sunday Masses, communities, and schools, and not much is noticed, talked about, or done about their situation. As a community of faith, these people need good Christians willing to listen to them, learn their actual conditions, and guide them in their needs. That accompanying presence speaks of God's love and concern for the good of those who feel they are solitary in their sorrowful moments. As professional medical care is becoming more open to a holistic approach, "there's a growing realization that faith communities are an important part of caring for people affected by mental illnesses."[69]

The second reason, he says, is that it is a justice issue.[70] The church can help awaken the minds of those in leadership

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67. Jose Granados, Stephan Kampowski, and Juan José Pérez-Soba, *Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017), p. 2-3.

68. Tom Lambert, "Catholics Must Accompany People with Mental Illness," *US Catholic*, March 4, 2019, https://uscatholic.org/articles/201903/catholics-must-do-more-to-accompany-people-with-mental-illness-says-this-deacon/ (accessed on May 28, 2024).

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

positions in government and society to the need for a better mental health system. In the Philippines, the church not only has to listen and abide by the directives of health authorities but also represent the poor and needy in pressing for more attention, seriousness, and services for them. There is a mental health law in the country that, among other things, seeks to reduce discrimination against those with mental difficulties.[71] Through its pastoral presence, the church can strongly endorse and push for its effective implementation. As mentioned earlier, this task is laid out in the church's social teachings. Those immersed in mental turmoil need concrete expressions of support. They are not helped by superficial and half-hearted occasional remembrance on certain days, promises of prayers, and feigned solidarity with their plight. They need the strong support of the community of faith they belong to.

Those who experience very deep emotional pain are often the lonely, rejected, marginalized, and excluded members of society. To them, the Lord Jesus must have a particular identification and a deeper affection. In his own emotional life as a human being, the Lord Jesus learned these unpleasant experiences as he went about his ministry. It is not enough to assure the mentally sick that their sufferings unite them in a profound way to the cross. Like the Lord Jesus, like all people, they are social beings and they need friendship, family, flesh and blood presence in their lives.[72]

It is not enough to lift these people in prayer. They want more and need more than signs of support. They yearn for the warmth of human friendship and the consolation of community

71. Lally, et. al., "Mental Health Services in the Philippines. "

72. Video, "The Agony of Emotional Suffering – The Heart of Hope with Deacon James Keating," *Discerning Hearts*, October 19, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2Lg6SrSRjA&list=PLqueiEKHoJedZSB72sk8IDD6sRYxIdULN&index=2 (accessed on June 21, 2024).

fellowship. The church, which is the Body of Christ on earth, is responsible for taking the initiative and finding those who are in silent and hidden pain. In a personal conversation with a visiting Japanese bishop, one of this paper's writers heard the prelate say that though the Japanese are not responding to the church's spiritual and doctrinal teachings because they are surrounded by material wealth and comfort, the Japanese who have mental health problems are drawn to the church because they feel the palpable love and concern of the community. The church's presence among those struggling with mental health here in the Philippines can also be a cogent testimony that God loves those who suffer the most and is the Good Shepherd who leads them toward "refreshing waters" (Ps 23:1-2).

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