TINIG LOYOLA

A STUDENT PUBLICATION OF THE LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 20:1-2 | S.Y. 2018-2019

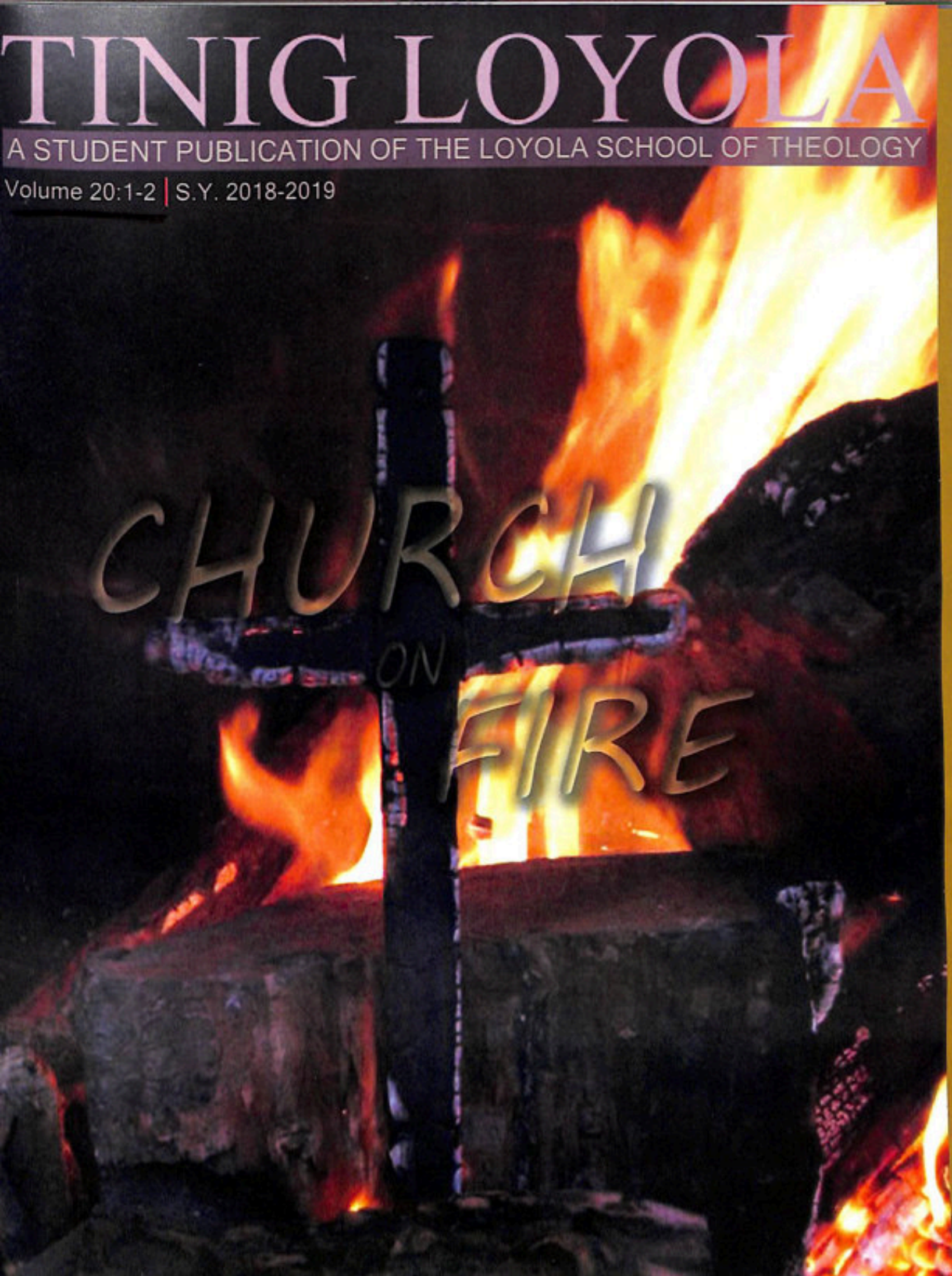




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On the evening of Holy Monday, April 15, 2019, city-dwellers and tourists alike watched in shock as the great symbol of Paris and the whole of France, the *Notre-Dame de Paris*, went up in flames. The whole world, with bated breath, witnessed the dramatic and stunning moment when the spire, and parts of the roof, already blazing, collapsed into the interior of the historic building, consuming with it years upon years of history. This was a tragedy, not only because of the cathedral's artistic and architectural value, but also for what it stood for: centuries of faith, unshaken by the torrents and waves of history, unbowed by countless wars and regime changes.

The theme the editorial board has chosen for this issue is "Church on Fire". In many ways, this is mirrored by the tragic blaze in *Notre-Dame*, for the Church is set ablaze from within and without. From within: the many scandals erupting left and right, each new revelation rocking the structure of the Church up to its very heights and to its deepest foundations, each new allegation revealing that even our leaders are not exempt from the fragilities of the human condition. From without: the many attacks by different forces on the relevance and voice of the Church in social issues, and the persecution of Christians in Africa and the Middle East. Just like *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the Church is on fire, and who can expect that it could be saved?

Yet there was not only one church ablaze that night. For around the burning structure, the Church *par excellence* began to form: numerous men and women who witnessed the tragedy, at times singing hymns or offering prayers, at times standing in shocked silence, but always and unreservedly *there*. As one church began to crumble, the other stood bravely by its side to remind us that despite the fires of destruction, there will always be persons for whom the Church is ever alive, and through whom we could expect that it would survive. In adversity, the Church shows itself to be made up of living stones, built up in the Spirit.

This is the other side of the theme we wish to present: the Church is set afire not only by scandals and issues, but also by passion, by the love of God, and the call to mission. Therefore, the response to one fire is not simply to douse it until it is contained, but to let the other blaze grow, the fire of love. Thus, this issue of *Tinig Loyola* will not only focus on the many problems confronting us as a Church, but the many ways we confront these problems, in all our own ways as part of this one people of God, called out of darkness to blaze in the night, until at last it sees the light of day.

The structure of *Notre-Dame* thankfully withstood the fire, and what has been left could be saved. But even if it could not be saved, we could still expect it to rise again, as the Church shall rise again, because the Church, as G.K. Chesterton says, "has a god who knew the way out of the grave." May the sorrowful serenading of the people of God, dedicated to the burning and perishing Lady of Paris, turn into dancing and joy at her rebirth, and may her very stones too cry out in gladness at the sight of her, "beautiful as Tirzah... comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners (Song of Songs 6:4)."

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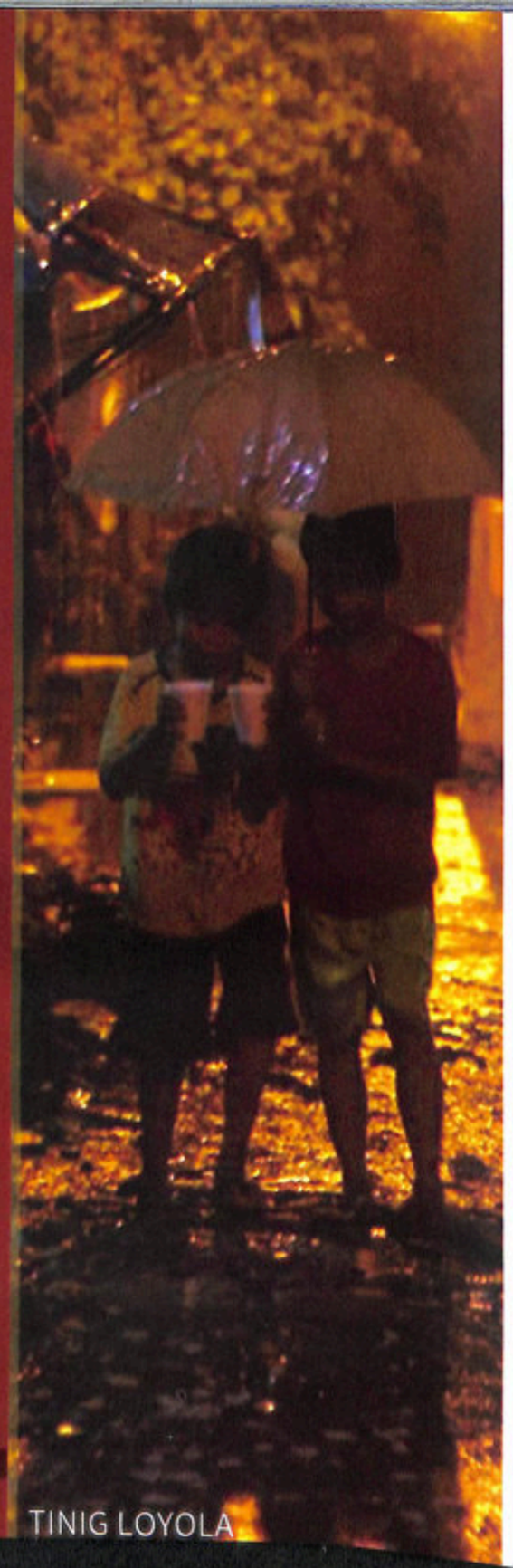
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Gladly, my prayers were answered in the Final Document of the XV Ordinary Synod of Bishops, which was an equally long process of discernment of the Synod Fathers with the help of young people. The Document highlights the notion of synodality, as a characteristic and movement of the Church in which its members gather together to listen to the promptings of the Spirit working in and with each other (Final Document of the XV Ordinary Synod of Bishops [FD], no. 121). Bearing this character, the Church allows each and every member to enter into a fruitful dialogue, helping each other name their concerns and hopes within their respective worldviews and language, for the sake of discerning particular responses to these concerns and hopes.

More than this dialogical characteristic, however, the Synod also recognizes that this synodal character is done not for the Church's sake alone; rather, synodality is done "for the sake of mission" (FD 125). In other words, believers gather, dialogue with each other, and discern not only for their own sake but more and importantly for the world in which the Church is tasked to evangelize. The Church listens and accompanies its believers in order that communities of believers themselves may be able to listen and accompany those whom they are tasked to approach: the poor, the marginalized, and the suffering among others; eventually, through this act of accompaniment, believers take part in gathering people in the Lord through various means and ways of living.

Highlighting and emphasizing this synodal character is for me a revolutionary move that perfectly responds to the concerns and challenges of this world. This is so because it enables the Church to genuinely encounter, listen, and understand people from their own contexts and perspectives. This became evident in the whole process of the 2018 Synod, as the young were granted space to speak of the things they believe, understand, and hope for in their own words. Thus, it is no surprise that the Final Document of the Synod, supported by the Presynodal Meeting Final Document and the *Instrumentum Laboris* which precedes the Synod, reflects a language and worldview characteristic of young people today. The document reflects their unique grasp of the phenomenon of social media, of diversity in sexual orientation (i.e., an apt understanding of the concerns of LGBT communities) as well as cultural shifts (e.g., complex familial and social environments), and of the natural environment, worldviews that the elderly bishops of the Synod might not have fully understood given their age and experience. More than that, the document also reflects the desire of young people to contribute to the Church and take initiatives that would draw more young people to the Church.

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

I think this whole process and its effect proves an important point that the institutional Church must take note. If our leaders and members of the clergy want the Church to reach out to specific groups and communities, then it should first provide the space and opportunities for communities and individuals to name their situation from their own perspectives and contexts. It must be willing to dialogue first on the level of the concerned people themselves, and it is only then that the Church proposes and discerns ways of moving forward and determining what the Lord desires for the Church and the community.





If this becomes a norm rather than an exception, this synodal approach becomes fruitful, given that there are enough resources and opportunities to do so. Parishes can gather ministers and their representatives to name their specific situations and concerns. Seminaries and formation institutes can allow formands to actually talk about their guidelines, formation goals, and ways of proceeding and living. Dioceses can grant space for their clergy and lay leaders to collaborate on equal grounds and talk about the important things that are related to the faith, life, and morals of the faithful. In these ways, the institutional Church becomes closer to the everyday life and concerns of people. This approach enables ordained and lay leaders to listen more and accompany the faithful to a closer and more intimate way. More importantly, this serves as a resistance toward rigid institutionalism and clericalism, where important decisions are left as a burden to priests and lay leaders alone; eventually, it allows the Church and ecclesial communities to own the concerns and challenges that they face and together propose solutions and ways of moving forward.

The Church as God's community whom He gathers is a fundamental concept in the Church's self-understanding, one that we are called to consciously reflect in the life and faith of each and every member of the people of God. The emphasis on the synodal character of the Church, geared toward greater participation in Christ's mission, reflects and lives up to this image. It is time that we take this fundamental concept more seriously and with greater conviction, to the point of abandoning rigid, top-bottom structures and allowing the Spirit to start with individual members and communities, working in and through them.



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LISTENING TO THE ENEMY

Robbie Paraan, SJ

In one of our Lenten community Masses, the priest, in reflecting on the theme of forgiveness, asked us to imagine the face of that one person we consider our enemy. I closed my eyes but I failed to think of one, not because I did not have any, but because I had so many and didn't know whom to choose!

I remember that now, as I write about the one common enemy we currently have as a Church: the sexual abuse crisis. I take this issue personally, being a scholastic preparing for the ministry of the priesthood and as someone who has learned to love our Church. Moreover, having worked as a catechist for sexually abused girls at some point in my formation, I have seen firsthand the trauma and the damage this issue has caused for children and their entire future.

The specific task given to me for reflection on this issue is not an easy one: if I were to become a priest, how would I deal with an ordained sexual offender who comes to me for help? As a priest, what do I exactly do when someone who has so tarnished the ordained ministry I belong to and the Church I love comes to me seeking to be consoled and understood? How should I react to someone who has hurt innocent people so deeply and so irreparably? When faced with the church's common enemy, how does one move from anger and hatred to forgiveness and even love?

One of the reasons the sexual abuse crisis has done so much damage is because we have failed to understand the entire problem in all its complexity. To a pastor, that must be very clear. In as much as there is no one solution to this issue as a whole, there is likewise no silver bullet in dealing with sexual offenders. Recent literature on the topic more or less agrees though that the perpetrator must immediately be taken away from any and all forms of priestly ministry where he could do more harm. Thus, a necessary

component of any pastoral care for abusers is referral both to his superior and to a specialist trained to assess and treat sexual offenders. It must be clear from the onset that the priority should be the safety of the victims.

However, the fact that the priest comes to me for help–assuming that I am not his superior or a specialist–means he is looking for something else. In addition to referring him to more competent authorities, what more could I really do? Apparently, not much but listen. Listening, however, can go a long way in the healing of all persons involved in the sexual abuse crisis, and the healing of the entire People of God.

Identifying and managing these blocks would, hopefully, free me to zone in on the person in front of me. When I see him I would probably be distracted by the memory of the victims of abuse I used to minister to, the thousands who have testified against perpetrator priests from around the world, and the several who have left the church angry at God and its ministers for letting this go on for decades. But I must 'forget' all these and focus on him and allow him to open up and freely share his story.

When he does share his story, I pray I would be sober enough not to be lulled into focusing too much on the details–on what was done, to whom, in what way–since that is not exactly my job. I hope to be graced to listen not so much to what happened but to listen to the fear, the shame, and, yes, the pain of this child of God. Many of these offenders were victims themselves. But even if they were not, they, too, are suffering much from their sins and, as a pastor, I would have to be the face of God's mercy there and then.

> In this process of helping and pastoring—which is really a ministry of listening—I must remember that in coming to me, the offender is ultimately seeking God

How does one listen and how does one listen well? In my experience, the first step is to be aware of one's blocks in listening. In this case, I would have to first fight against my tendency to judge the person based solely on his actions–no matter how deplorable those are and how these have hardened into abusive behavior. There is also the guilt that I feel even now, while writing this piece. "Why am I even considering helping these people out? Shouldn't I just be focusing on the victims?" I have to fight that nagging voice of guilt to listen well. Another block would be the suspicion that he does not seem to show 'enough' remorse for the gravity of his sins. But who am I to assess what goes on in this person's heart?

And as I listen to him, I have to listen to myself, too. Thank God I have not been involved in such cases; in that sense the two of us are very much different. But don't I have childhood traumas as well from which, it seems, I have never fully recovered? Am I not burdened by the same challenge of loneliness that is shared by all humanity, but is highlighted, in a way, by the celibacy of priesthood? Did I not, at some point in my life, hurt someone and wished for nothing but to make things right? I think true listening is possible only when there is



compassion. A pastor must find ways to enter into the chaos of the abuser, no matter how dark and alien the terrain may be–no matter if that means stirring up the inner chaos we all have as sinners.

he is still a priest. But before he is a priest, he is a child of God. To reawaken the divine spark in him is fundamental to his movement towards healing and reconciliation.

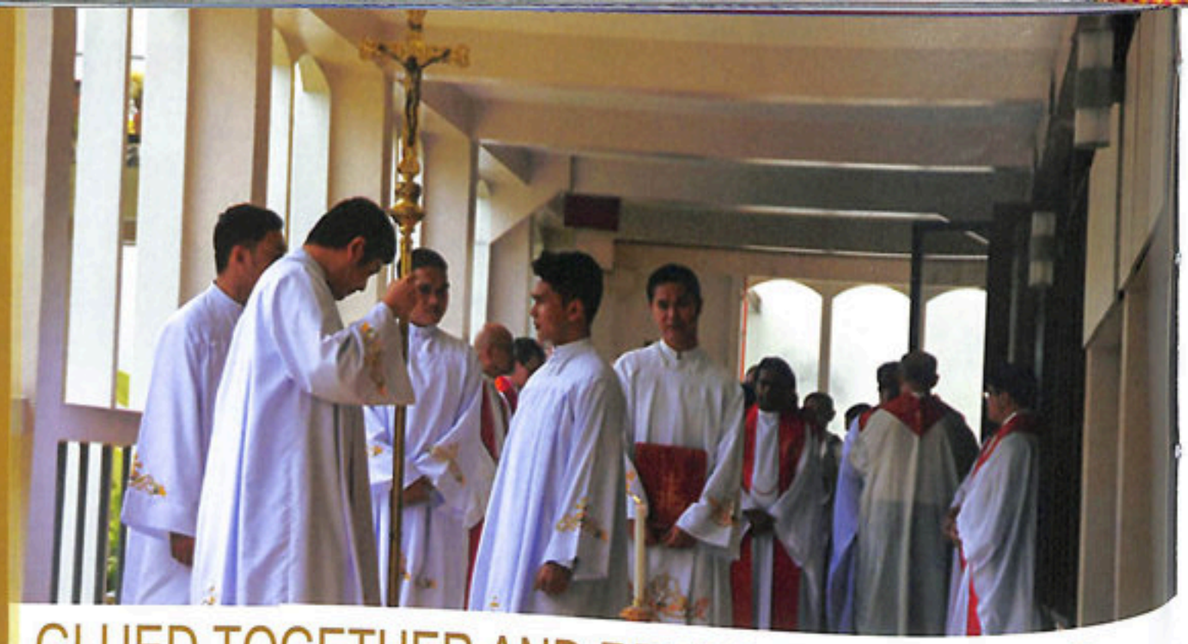
This kind can only come out through prayer

Above all, in this process of helping and pastoring–which is really a ministry of listening–I must remember that in coming to me, the offender is ultimately seeking God. Thus, I must listen to the Father speaking through his Son and Spirit in my encounter with the offender. If God's face is mercy, then I must be that to the one I minister to. Before I send him off to his superior and to specialists who can help him avoid backsliding into his abusive behavior, it is crucial to remind him of his fundamental identity as a child of God. Even if his ministry of service as a priest would have to change radically as a consequence of his actions, it would be best to remind him that

And when he has left me to deal with the messy and tedious process of reconciliation, I still have to pray for him. In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples wondered why they could not drive away a demon. Jesus said to them, "This kind can only come out through prayer." We constantly have to listen to the Lord if we want to purge our church from our common enemy.



Bro. Robbie Paraan is a third year theology student and scholastic of the Society of Jesus.



GLUED TOGETHER AND REMAINING STRONG

The Challenge and Grace of Integration in Priestly Formation

Fr. Midyphil Billones

The Humpty Dumpty syndrome in priesthood

"Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty back together again." When I was a child, it was always amusing to see an egg-shaped figure on the ground with shells splattered everywhere. It was comedic! For after all the name Humpty Dumpty is believed to be an 18th century reduplicative term used to refer to dull and clumsy persons. Now that I am an adult, the poem takes on new hues of meaning, highlighting more the dark dimension of the shatteredness and above all the helplessness to be mended. It is tragic! Priesthood, when deconstructed from the ideal and viewed from the real, undergoes this same situation in analogous manner. The crisis of priesthood today and the much publicized scandals or damage in history is like this fall from the wall. It results in the shatteredness and brokenness in her priests. Once the scandal erupts, it's hard to put him back again. It is important to notice in the poem that the fall is not the most tragic aspect. It is, rather, the fact that the fall led to shatterredness, and consequently all help attempted ended up in vain. The last part captures this exercise in futility; they tried "to pull, push and patch him but could not put him back together again." As such, one cannot be far from the truth if we attempt to describe this as "the humpty dumpty syndrome of priestly life."

From breaking to mending, the sacred drama through the ages

Leonardo da Vinci left us with an enigmatic illustration of the *Vitruvian Man* or the *Universal Man*, a symbol for the perfect man because of the perfect integration of body, mind and spirit. When we look at the stuff of our humanity (the humus) we see all too clearly the mess, the foibles, and the mistakes. All of history is replete of man's weaknesses causing pain. Scripture, in contrast to extolling the perfect man, rather realistically embraces the imperfection and the cracks of human beings and believes that this is where God manifests his salvific power. The belief that "through the cracks the grace of God enters" is a constant theological refrain in the Sacred Scriptures. Instead of perfect man, Ezekiel prophesizes on how God works by his power over dried bones. How it gradually restores life by joining limbs, joining nerves, joining sinews and muscles, joining all the body from death to life. God here is portrayed not only as having re-animating grace but also integrating power (cf. Ezekiel 37). The same power is also depicted in John, when Jesus prayed that all may be one (John 17:21). He preludes this with the acceptance that his disciples will be scattered by fear, but he consecrates himself for them in love that all may be one. Again the same power, this time in the love of Jesus, is manifested as a power that heals, restores and integrates. Throughout the ages, the drama that unfurled in our salvation history is this: first there was chaos, God creates order and beauty; man chooses to scatter, God gathers; man breaks the covenant, God restores and renews the covenant; man sins, Jesus loves us back to the heart of the Father! Only God's love then can gift us with full and complete integration. Any formation in priesthood must be situated in this universal context of salvation and integration by the saving power of God.

Integral, integrated and integrating Formation

It is not rare that we hear comments of disbelief: a particular priest is intelligent but how come he has committed such huge problems in his ministry? A highly developed intellect without the other dimensions cultivated in a balanced manner can result in a disproportioned person and consequently problematic ministry. No less that Jorge Carlos Patron Wong, the Archbishop Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, described the dire consequences that can result from the over emphasis of one dimension to the neglect of others. That is why, in one address, he stressed that "formation should be marked by *integrality*, meaning, the harmonious development that leads to the maturation of the whole person." He further added that the formand needs to prepare in a complete manner - body, mind, soul and heart; and thus psycho-affective equilibrium, theological preparation, spiritual depth and pastoral charity. In response to the phenomenon of shatteredness in priestly ministry, the new *ratio fundamentalis* has pointed the need of this principle of integrality in priestly formation. This integration happens in the context of the person of the candidate, the programs of formation and the formative community.



Integral Subject. To be a man of integrity or to become an "integral person" - that is the mantra seminarians are often exhorted to heed. What does this mean in concrete? It means that the various dimensions of his person must be developed into a cohesiveness that is mirrored by interior authenticity and external consistency in the response to formation. It begins with the offering of the total self - *totus tuus*, (totally yours) - surrender to the Lord. This means not only committing one's mind to be

theologically formed but also, according to the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (RFIS), one's soul, humanity and heart as well. One cannot simply say, "I give my intellectual assent to formation," while this does not find validation in one's presence in the chapel where spirituality is nourished. This is why Jorge C. Patron Wong would caution that we need to avoid the anomaly of shattered non-integrated disciples, "such as those with big head but small body (intellectualism); those with strong spirit but a fragile mind and body (spiritualism); those who boast of having great pastoral interest but possess little spirit (superficiality)." Integral formation then is the recognition that as far as the candidate is concerned, he is a singular being yet



composed of various dimensions that all must be configured to the person of Christ. Thus the formation invites him, and even demands him to honestly bring and commit his whole person and all its dimensions to be under formation. Why? Because, as Cardinal Wong says, the call of God implies everything. It is the whole person, with all that he is and all that he possesses, who will be at the Lord's service in the Christian community. The one called is an "integral subject", namely, someone who has been previously chosen to attain a sound interior life, without divisions or contradictions (RFIS 92). Only when all aspects and dimensions of one's being is surrendered for harmonious integration that vocational maturity happens within the candidate.

Integrated Pedagogical Model

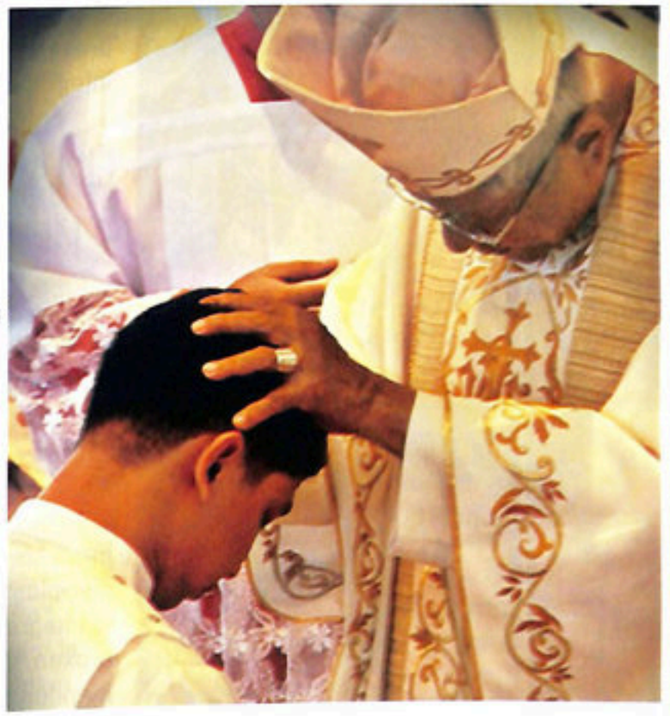
A few years back, when experts analyzed buildings that collapsed during the slight tremors due to earthquakes, the observation they arrived at is that it was due not only to the force of nature but also to the "lack of structural integrity". This means that the foundation was poorly established and the beams not properly bonded; it was not strong enough to hold it up during intense pressure. The result is the collapse of the building. Similarly, in priestly life, the lack of inner structure which is made of strongly interconnected values and discipline, can result in ministerial crisis and disillusionment. It is precisely because of this that the new *ratio fundamentalis* emphasizes the need for using an integrated pedagogical model in formation as the key to producing balance and mature future priests. It states that "it is necessary to adopt an integrated pedagogical model in order to reach its objective: a journey that allows the formative community to cooperate with the action of the Holy Spirit, ensuring a proper balance between the different dimensions of formation." Having pet programs that are aimed at making the institution stand out from others, to the neglect of the other

The call of God implies everything

dimensions, can compromise this process of integration. This is why the crucial task of formation is "to facilitate, through the Holy Spirit, a journey of faith and gradual harmonization" (RFIS 3,28). Vigilance against erroneous visions of priesthood and discernment of programs directed at integration is a constant in the formation process.

Integrating Formative Community

'It takes a village to raise a child'. This is accurately true and the same goes with priestly formation. It takes a "formative community" to form a seminarian (RFIS 139). Harmonization within and creative interior synthesis can only happen with the aid and accompaniment of the formative community which includes the bishop, the formation team, the spiritual directors, counselors, mentors, lay experts and teachers and fellow seminarians. This is the reason why the new Ratio underlines that the community life is the environment where the dimensions come together to attain mutual harmony and integration (RFIS 90). The formative community then provides the integrating space and relationships for the seminarian.



It takes a village to raise a child ... The same goes with priestly formation

Since the disciple is the integral subject that God has called, the awareness, acceptance and harmonization of his inner dimensions is part of his yes to God. The programs should be founded on the pedagogical model of integratedness of the various dimensions to provide inner foundations through storms and tests. Finally, the seminarian grows when the formative community provides him with integrating space and relationships where his vocation can grow towards balanced maturity and authentic commitment.

It is fascinating that the poem Humpty Dumpty in some contemporary version ends with restoration. What I find striking is another version in a song which ends with a twist: "glued together, it remained strong..." But what is this element that binds to keep the priest strong? Medical science reveals a study that when man's skin is cut and bleeds, a certain element in the body becomes the binding cell that heals it. It acts like a cellular glue that binds the other cells for the work of regeneration of new skin. This amazing element in our human DNA is called "laminin." Placed under the powerful microscope, it is fascinating to see that it takes the shape of the cross. This is such a marvel to behold because in our journey of discipleship where we experience brokenness and shatteredness, even as we say yes to God, it is Jesus alone, who gave his life on the cross and rose from the dead, that is the central force in priestly formation.



We must admit, at times the integral subject will be hounded by moments of disintegration, at times, even the best programs will suffer human limitations to fully integrate' and at times the formative community can fail in giving testimony to pursue integration and maturation. Confronted by all these, it is good to recognize that it is only by His grace that true integration happens within the heart of the disciple (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). Because of His grace, that penetrates our wounds and brokenness, we can journey deeper towards integration.

> It is only by His grace that true integration happens within the heart of the disciple

From scattered disciples to gathered disciples; from internally disjointed formands to integrated priests and religious; from broken 'humpty dumpties' to healed and mended followers; the journey of discipleship is at its core the story of how His love truly "glued us together, and made us remain strong!"



Fr. Midyphil Billones graduated from the Loyola School of Theology as a formand of San Jose Seminary. He is currently the rector of St. Joseph Regional Seminary in Jaro, Iloilo, and sits on the national board of drafters of the new Ratio Nationalis



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EQUIPPED FOR THE JOURNEY:
SALIENT FEATURES AND CHALLENGES OF THE NEW RATIO ON PRIESTLY FORMATION

Fr. Renato Repole, SJ

Editor's Note: The document called the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis *(or* Ratio, *for short) was issued by the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy in 2016, to update existing guidelines on priestly formation. Since then, it has been the duty of formators of seminaries, as well as formands, to digest, interpret, and carry out the salient points of the document, so as to take seriously the work of forming pastors in the image of the Good Shepherd. The author, a seminary rector, is also a member of the board drafters of the* Ratio Nationalis, *which would situate and appropriate the* Ratio *within the context of priestly formation in the Philippines.*

By now, the existence of the new *Ratio* for priestly formation has become a byword in seminaries and other houses of formation. Everybody is curious about what the "new" elements are and how these impact the present program of formation. Its creation is a welcome development for it shows the seriousness of the Church in providing a program of formation for future priests that is constantly updated and attuned to the present circumstances of the times.

Salient Points of the New *Ratio*

At the risk of repeating what has been said in the document itself and by those who elaborated on it, what follows is a list of and short comments on what we consider to be the salient points of the document.

Priestly Formation Seen as One, Integrated, Communitarian, and Missionary

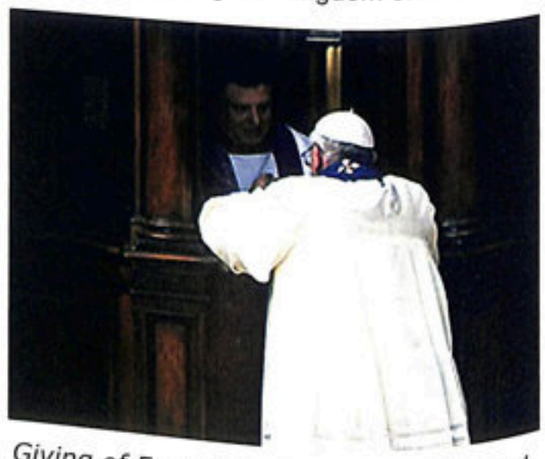
More than ever, the new *Ratio* emphasizes the need for a priestly formation that is holistic and relevant to the circumstances of the times. Four major adjectives are used to describe the new *Ratio*. First, it sees priestly formation as *one* single journey of discipleship or configuration to Christ, the Good Shepherd. That is, it takes into account not just the formal years of seminary training but, in fact, the whole life of the person, from his baptism into Christ, to his

growth in the Christian community nourished by the other sacraments and channels of grace, to the time he feels, discerns and embraces the priestly vocation, to his formal training in the seminary, to his life in the priestly ministry and, indeed, throughout his entire life. All the various stages in the life of the person who is called comprise a single journey which is characterized by this document as both *discipleship* and *configuration* to Christ.

Second, priestly formation is seen as integrated, that is, it takes into account the various aspects involved in priestly formation, particularly the four (4) major dimensions, namely, the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions. As noted earlier, in previous documents there was a slant or more emphasis given towards the spiritual and intellectual dimensions leaving the human and pastoral aspects downplayed or even neglected. At the same time, "integrated" here seems to mean that the four dimensions must receive equal attention in formation–something which we shall comment on later. So that a priest that is "produced" is one who has embodied or integrated these 4 aspects in his life: he is a priest who is grounded in a personal and profound relationship with the Good Shepherd, imbued with human qualities or virtues as the Incarnate Lord was, knowledgeable of the essential components of the Faith, and gifted with a heart that is service-oriented and compassionate especially towards the least and marginalised in the Church and society.

Third, priestly formation is *communitarian*. That is, every vocation has an ecclesial character in that the formand is called and chosen by God from a believing community, is nurtured by it, and is meant to serve it. No seminarian becomes a "free-lance" priest, becoming and ministering as priest on his own. He becomes a member of the priestly brotherhood with the Bishop as head and leader of the Christian community to which he will be missioned.

Fourth and last, priestly formation is *missionary* in character. This needs no further elaboration as it is obvious that one becomes a priest not to serve oneself but others, the people whom God will entrust to him. The priest undertakes a mission received from Christ through his Bishop (or Superior), and his life to be lived in service, collaborating with the Lord of the harvest in the task of building the Kingdom of God.



Giving of Equal Emphasis to Initial and Ongoing Formation

Another laudable emphasis of the new *Ratio* is the recognition that formation does not end at ordination: that ongoing formation is as necessary as initial or seminary formation. Those who have been priests can testify that after ordination there has been, until lately, little attention (if at all) that is given to ongoing formation. Somehow, it is presupposed that with ordination, formation has ended and the ordained priest is now fully "formed." The fact, however, is that a follow-up program becomes more urgent as the priest is now immersed in ministry, facing actual challenges and difficulties, some of which he might never had imagined encountering while in the seminary. The reality of dealing with people of different temperaments, of loneliness as one lives (usually) alone in a parish, the triggering of old personal issues and needs, even the challenge of raising funds and building infrastructures in a poor parish, etc., can be daunting and too much especially for the young priest. Without a program of ongoing formation that anticipates and addresses these various needs, the priest is left vulnerable and struggles to cope, and could even "fall" eventually. Happily, this follow-up program is now happening or at least beginning to happen in a number of dioceses and religious houses, with someone explicitly missioned to head it.

New Descriptions of the Various Stages of Initial Formation

What is also new in this new *Ratio* is the adoption of new categories or labels for each of the stages of formation. In the first place, already there is novelty in the formal inclusion of a "Propaedeutic Year"- a period of one to two years of introduction to seminary life and to the elements of Faith and other seminary structures like prayer, etc. It is the period prior to studies in Philosophy. While some seminaries already had the equivalent of this phase before (like the SFY or Spiritual Formation Year, or Pre-College Year), its formal introduction has standardised formation among Episcopal Conferences. Here, formal discernment of vocation can be taught and made so that seminarians hopefully arrive at a basic and yet "gripping" conviction of being called as they apply for Philosophy and Theology formation later on.

The second stage, called the "Discipleship Stage" is the period of Philosophical Studies. While recognising that the whole of the life of a Christian, and therefore that of one formed to become a priest, is a journey in discipleship, the use of the category here is to underline or focus attention on the aspect of discipleship that one is already undertaking. Needless to say, the period of Philosophy is meant to hone the seminarian's skills in reasoning, reflection, and critical thinking. Here, he also continues to discern his vocation, to discover his talents and to begin to develop them.

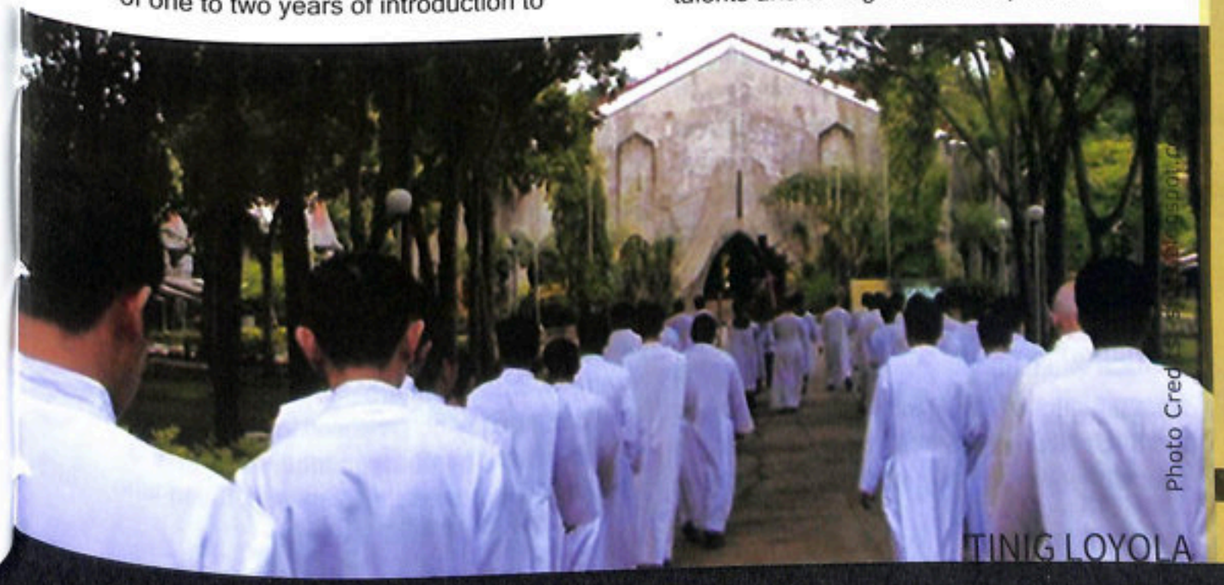


Photo Cred



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The third stage is called the "Configuration Stage," which is the period of Theological Formation. Again, just like the idea of "discipleship," configuration is the process which all believers undergo - configuration to Christ - but correlating it with theological formation is meant to underline perhaps the "configuration" or "conformity" with Christ that those in theology should already be experiencing as they near the end of their initial formation.

The fourth and last stage is the "Vocational Synthesis" or "Pastoral" Stage, the period between the end of theological formation and ordination. Here, usually the formand returns to his home diocese and is assigned to various tasks, often with the Bishop, during which he is expected to "test" or "verify" what he learned through years of formal training in actual pastoral contexts–to try to see the connection between what he had learned and the realities and challenges that he is now facing. This hopefully enables him to make a definitive commitment to embrace the life of a shepherd symbolised in his asking for ordination.

Recognition of the many agents of formation

Another laudable thing in this new *Ratio* is the recognition of the many and various agents that are actually involved in the formation of a priest. That is to say, it not just involves the seminarian and the formators but all other companions in the journey: his fellow seminarians, seminary employees and other lay collaborators, the Bishop, of course, the presbyterate, the professors, the specialists or experts in various fields like medicine, psychology, art, ecology, administration, and social communications. Moreover, the Ratio recognizes the role of families, the parish and other ecclesial communities and of consecrated persons. The participation of these various groups necessarily lightens the "burden" of the formators and ensures that the formands receive formation from various perspectives or outlooks.

Early preparation of seminarians for eventual roles in their dioceses

A final salient element to mention is the attention given to so-called "Specialized Studies" or disciplines that are meant to prepare seminarians for specific tasks when they become priests. This demands an early assessment or "inventory" of particular leanings, talents, or capabilities detected among seminarians. In so doing, those, for example, who are interested in or like Canon Law can already be prepared in view of possible tasks in marriage tribunals or in the Chancery or of teaching. Similarly, those who have capacity for languages and are interested in the Word of God can already start learning the Biblical languages in view of Biblical studies. Otherwise, a diocese can find itself simply (if not embarrassingly) assigning people to tasks without the necessary preparations, thus resulting in mediocre programs, if not problematic situations.

There are other important elements that one can glean from the new *Ratio* but these are enough for our present consideration.



SOME POSSIBLE CHALLENGES IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING THE NEW *RATIO*

While we find the new *Ratio* to be a more "fortified" and improved document as it embodies the "wisdom" and experience of the previous documents and years of experience incorporated into it, we see possible challenges that stand in the horizon of its actualization or implementation. In these remaining lines, we shall try to single them out albeit only in broad strokes and even in form of questions.

The challenge of actually reading and reflecting on its contents

This seems to be a common challenge when it comes to documents or reading materials in general. Will everyone, or at least those principally involved in formation, find time to read, familiarize themselves with, and reflect on it? Already, we have a very good formation document in the Philippines called the *Updated Philippine Program of Priestly Formation* (UPPPF). But how many of us (at least seminarians and formators) have really read, reflected on, and tried to actualize fully its contents? That is why there needs to be, in the case of the new *Ratio*, a way by which the major stakeholders are able to explore or be familiar with this document; otherwise, it can remain like the other previous documents.

The challenge of "integration" in an actual program of formation

The *Ratio* envisions a formation program that is "integrated," that is, one that takes into account the four major dimensions of priestly life: the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimension. However, what does this mean in the concrete? Is it enough to have these four dimensions incorporated into the program of formation? Most of if not all seminaries already do this. Or, does it envision that the four dimensions should receive more or less **equal** time and attention? If so, then, is this realistic since the present setup is such that most of the time of the seminarians during a day is spent at school for studies (intellectual dimension), not to mention specific hours of study that are also added? how can the other dimen-

-sions receive "equal" time or attention when the most of the day is dedicated for studies? Are there attempts at formulating or creating a daily program that gives more or less equal time or attention to the four dimensions?

Another implication which one can draw from this is that, since the four dimensions are to receive more or less equal attention at every stage of the initial formation (if this is really possible), then, perhaps existing programs that are added to the basic four-year program such as the SPFY or PSIY (San Jose Seminary, St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, San Carlos Seminary) and others are no longer necessary? But will the "depth" or "focus" that these programs are meant to achieve not sacrificed if they are discontinued?

The process and challenge of drafting the Ratio Nationalis

We know that from these "universal" principles that the new *Ratio* provides each of the Episcopal Conferences is to come up with a *Ratio Nationalis* which would take into account the specific contexts of those formed in these Conferences. And for this, the new *Ratio* demands that a wide consultation should be done among the various stakeholders. How will this consultation be done actually? What data are to be gathered? What are the steps involved in the whole process of coming up of the national program?

On the other hand, how will the existing Philippine document (UPPPF) impact on the *Ratio Nationalis* that is to be drafted? Many already note the excellence of this document, only that this has perhaps not been fully known and implemented. Will the new national program be a completely new document, or will it incorporate the salient



RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS
INSTITUTIONIS SACERDOTALIS

elements of the UPPPF? Finally, what is the timetable for the *Ratio Nationalis*? When do we expect to have it?

There are other questions that can be asked regarding the new *Ratio* and the planned national *Ratio*, but for the time being we limit ourselves to these. The immediate practical challenge for each one, especially formands and formators, is really to be familiar with the contents of the UPPPF and the new Ratio so we can engage more fully in the process of coming up with a Ratio Nationalis and a formation program that is more vigorous, relevant, and life-giving.

CONCLUSION

The journey of each believer is indeed a journey of gradual discipleship and configuration to Christ. The journey is long, but as God provided the prophet Elijah with nourishment and sustenance for the journey that might be long (cf. 1Kgs. 19,7) so also we believe that God through the Church and this new *Ratio* has equipped us for the journey ahead.





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EVER THINE, EVER MINE, EVER OURS:
Leadership and Reciprocal Submission in Marriage

Bernadine Lanot

Recently on Facebook, a post that was supposedly depicting the "biblical order of the family" caught my attention. It featured a diagram in the form of an umbrella, with multiple canopies, each canopy decreasing in size from top to bottom. At the very top, the biggest canopy represented Christ. Below him, a smaller canopy represented the husband, whose roles, according to the same image, are to "protect, lead, and provide for the family." Yet another smaller canopy below the husband's supposedly belongs to the wife, whose roles are to "comfort, teach, and nurture" the children who in turn should "love and obey parents."

Some relatives of mine shared the image with enthusiasm. *Yes, this is how things are supposed to be in the family!*

I have been familiar with similar attitudes about marriage and family life since I was a child. As a young, impressionable teenager, I once listened to a man - a good, family man whom I respect to this day - interpret Ephesians 5:22-33. He was convinced that the man indeed is the head of the wife and the family as Christ is the head of the Church. And so, in his own family, he leaves "matters of preference" - such as what to eat for dinner, where to travel for

vacation, how to design the living room, etc. - to his wife. Whereas, he, as the husband and the father, is tasked with "matters of principle" - questions and issues that, according to him, involve much more serious discernment. He said that this setup helps keep order and peace in their home.

I have nothing discouraging to say if that is what the husband and the wife freely and consciously agreed upon in their marriage. But there are also questions that are begging to be answered: Is this indeed the ideal setup for every Christian family? What of the wife's principles? What of her voice when it comes to making life-altering decisions? Is leadership a task that must be delegated exclusively to the man?

Healthy modern relationships emphasize equality as a value, where partners see each other as equals and make important decisions together, instead of having only one person call all the shots. The language that the Church uses in *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) describing the ideal spousal relationship more closely mirrors this trend than the proclivity of some Catholics to encourage leadership on the part of the man and submission on the part of the woman.

Each spouse has to humbly serve the other with one's natural, individual gifts, whatever those gifts may be

Instead, the Church rejects "all improper interpretations of the passage in the Letter to the Ephesians where Paul tells women to 'be subject to your husbands'" and instead echoes St. John Paul II's insight that the unity between husband and wife is "constituted by a reciprocal donation of self, which is also a mutual subjection." This "reciprocal submission" is "marked by fidelity, respect, and care" (AL 156). Here, I think that "mutual subjection" and "reciprocal submission" are the key words and it would



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do all Catholics a lot of good to reflect on them and their meaning. We know from the text that "reciprocal submission" is "marked by fidelity, respect, and care" (AL 156) and that it is clear that *both* spouses are now exhorted to submit to each other. Moreover, AL maintains that "femininity and masculinity are not rigid categories... A rigid approach turns into an overaccentuation of the masculine or feminine, and does not help children and young people to appreciate the genuine reciprocity incarnate in the real conditions of matrimony" (AL 286).



Photo Credits: UNFPA Philippines

Taking these insights together, what I could personally glean from Church teaching as presented in AL is that leadership and responsibility should not be rigidly categorized as "masculine" and submission and surrender as "feminine." Instead, I believe that each spouse has to humbly serve the other with one's natural, individual gifts, whatever those gifts may be. "Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else 'to perfect the couple's love'" (AL 89). But more importantly, both are called to be leaders, negotiating, discerning, and deciding what is good for the family, as "decisions cannot be made unilaterally, since each spouse shares responsibility for the family" (AL 220).

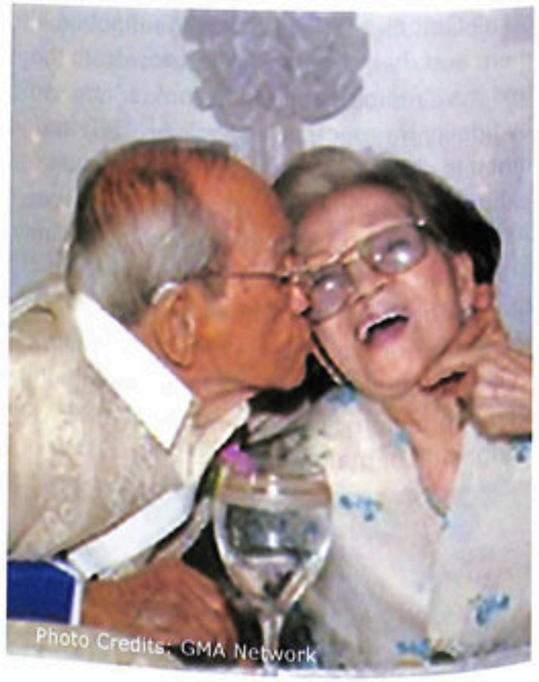
Both spouses, by virtue of their marriage being a sacrament of the relationship between Christ and His Church, are called to lead and to submit in a healthy, dynamic way to each other. For if the relationship between husband and wife is supposed to mirror the love between Christ and His Church, so should both persons' capacity to lead, submit, and love like Christ be recognized. In this way can the equality between man and woman be truly respected.

These insights are not alien to us; they have already sprung from Church teaching. What needs to be done is to assimilate these norms into our cultures, challenge rigid categorizations of the feminine and the masculine, and emancipate men and women everywhere who are still slaves to a false image of family life as a hierarchy, where decision-making and power are concentrated and kept at the top and masculinity and femininity are restricted within rigid categories.

"The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection" (AL 11). The love that poured out to us from the Godhead is not about hierarchy and control of power as much as it is about a communion of love and mutual donation of self. The Father, Son, and Spirit act together as one. And so, how can a married couple raise together a family that is truly a sacrament, an image of the Trinity?

Thinking about how a marriage can reflect the love of God calls to mind an image from a story that I once read in a book about a married couple. The wife and the husband

both worked in medicine until the wife was critically injured in an accident that led to her incapacity to talk, walk, write, recall memories, and other basic functions. Her husband bathed her, styled her hair, came home after work to clean and cook and tuck their children into bed. He and their loved ones celebrated every little victory - the wife recalling a new memory or a name, brushing her own hair, or walking a few steps. Then one morning, the husband turned up the volume of the stereo and began to dance. Their children giggled and joined in. The wife began crying. Without a word, her husband came over to her, lifted her from her wheelchair, put her feet onto his, and danced with her. It was the first instance in such a long time that she laughed.


Photo Credits: GMA Network

Ultimately, a married couple has one mission: to reveal the love of God through their story, whatever may happen in it. The relationship between the husband and his sick wife were of reciprocal submission, fidelity, respect, care, and joy. And, more importantly, it is an example of how God reveals Godself in the sacrament of marriage. Christ is the High Priest who offers himself as a sacrifice. Christ leads, submits, and loves. The challenge is to offer up the marriage as a sacrifice and an act of worship. The husband and the wife are the Church worshipping with Christ and it is Christ who makes his love known through and in them, and transforms their love and makes it a worthy offering to the Father.

There is always the promise of the Resurrection - that God will take the sacrifice and lift it into new life. How can married people live in expectation of the Resurrection? If Resurrection is about being our risen selves, how can two people in love be more fully and freely themselves, even as they are submitting and dying to each other?

As with all great mysteries, each married couple has to live out the question, and, through it all, remember the God who is faithfully and lovingly present in every moment of our suffering, who celebrates every little success and sweeps us up into His arms and engages us in a dance of communion, life, and joy.

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LIVING WITH DEPRESSION IN THE LIGHT OF FAITH

Sr. Cecille Tuble, RC

He calls me, with great affection, "my *Kintsukuroi*," I protest: "Lord, that is just a fancy name for a cracked pot!" And, with a twinkle in His eye, He responds: "Exactly!"

Kintsukuroi or *kintsugi* literally means "golden repair," and refers to the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquered gold, silver or platinum. It celebrates, instead of disguises, all the brokenness that a vessel undergoes, its cracks and fissures "engoldened" and highlighted to make the pottery more beautiful. It seems a fitting nickname then, for one whose broken mind is held together only by the sheer grace of God.

I have lived with mental illness all my life. Mental illness runs in my family in the same way as hypertension or diabetes run in other families. Indeed, the family tree is lush with clearly wacky fruit of varying shades of crazy, prompting my psychiatrist to comment: "genetically speaking, you're fully loaded." Depression first arrived at my doorstep and claimed a spot in my mind when I was thirteen, and has never left since. I've had four major depressive episodes, each one bearing the same ominous symptoms, each one manifesting itself in a different way, each one worse than the last.



How does one make sense of a life redolent with madness? Science has long held that the seat of our consciousness is in our brain, that it is our mind–our thinking prefrontal cortex and our feeling limbic brain–that makes us most human. Our minds allow us to remember the past, to analyze and synthesize, to make connections and find meaning, to form and cherish relationships, to anticipate and plan for the future, to grieve and to rejoice, to experience awe and gratitude, to be open to the transcendent, and to believe in ultimate reality. But what if this basic capacity is compromised, as in the case of mental illness? What kind of faith is possible for a broken mind?

The other day, I asked God these questions, and He only gave me one word: *Grace*. It was God's shorthand for: *what did you learn in LST?* Then I remembered my Grace class and Karl Rahner, and my Revelation-Faith class and faith. And I was deeply comforted. I realized that it was all about love–not mine, because it's all battered and soiled and tattered and pretty much crumbling at the edges–but God's. God's love that is silent, present, enveloping, and penetrating every tiny space of my being, as if my breath rises and falls on its skin, the skin of God's love, and my pores open up as windows to its air, and we share the space between, or rather, God lets me in, and I *live*.

Of course, when I was in the throes of depression, I did not feel that love. We have quite a tabloid-colorful history, God and I, given the state of my mind. But God remained unerringly loving, steadfast in his faithfulness, His grace the gold that held together my brokenness. All through these years, by God's grace, I learned a few lessons along the way:

Feelings are not everything

This is of paramount importance to those who suffer from depression and other mood disorders. Even though I was convinced that God is my first love, during depression, I found myself desperately rummaging through my heart, and all I could find and grasp were nothing but junk, junk, junk. I struggled with my feelings as they wandered around aimlessly, window-shopping and gawking at far, far inferior substitutes. There were days when I was overwhelmed with an awful, weighty blandness, by an oppressive sadness that was like black ink that had spilled over the once neat and orderly appearance of my life, staining everything into a bleak grayness. During those times all I could hold on to was the tenacious belief, against all feeling, that God loved everyone, including unlovable me. And it was this one thought, that God is indeed good, that saved me from doing that most terrible, unthinkable of acts, that of self-destruction.

Be real before God

Depression is a shaming disease, and one feels unworthy of anyone's company, including God's. But I've learned how important it was to be real, to just show up in prayer in all my resplendently messed-up, disheveled self. I would fight God. Wait, that is not accurate, because God never retaliated. It was more like I threw a temper tantrum. And God, good mother that She is, would gather me, all flailing arms and kicking legs, in Her arms. Apparently She never asked Herself why on earth She created such a nasty creature. God would hold me, and in that embrace, I found the courage to get help for myself. Professional help.

Stay in Prayer

In depression, everything is an onerous burden, and you'd often wonder how you could make it through the day. This also manifests as the constant temptation to forego prayer: I'm too tired, Lord. Or, just do a hit-and-run thing: spew out one's toxicity on God, then get up and leave. It takes faith, which is a grace from God, to stay in prayer. To wait for God, and in that often frightening space of waiting, to experience one's utter helplessness and utmost need for God. But it is also to experience what Psalm 40 beautifully depicts: "I waited, waited for the Lord, who bent down and heard my cry. Drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp. Set my feet upon rock, steadied my steps...." Thus, to stay in prayer is to trust that God will never abandon anyone, and that eventually the light will come.



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francis benaya facebook

Be grateful for the daily manna

There is a certain grandiosity in depression, ironically. This grandiosity is glimpsed in the all-or-nothing cognitive distortions one has: *there is nothing good now, there will never be anything good. Ever.* One is thus blind to the small, inconspicuous acts of love, the unseen graces that already abound in one's life. It helps to remember the Israelites in the desert, and how God patiently provided for His cantankerous bunch. Every day is a grace unto itself, what more for the little and great gifts that come freely from such a generous and giving God? Depressed brains are overly focused on negativity, and scientific studies show that

one powerful way to counteract that negativity is to activate the gratitude circuit in the brain. Theologically, it reminds us that we are all beloved children of a caring God, and saying "thank you" brings us home to this deep truth about our core identity.

SURRENDER TO GRACE.

Now, this is the most faith-y lesson of all, because, how exactly does one surrender to grace? Unfortunately, God did not deem it necessary to equip us with a detailed manual. Faith is a gift, yet our own doing, as we all learned in our Rev-Faith class. Back in 2014, it was only one week since my diagnosis, and the meds have yet to kick in. I spent my 8-day retreat mostly sleeping, and in the few times I did try to pray, my mind was too foggy with drugs. Afterwards, in the airport on my way home, I felt the awful, enormous reality of what I had become.

There were many other surrenders along the way. But what felt like the breaking was in reality the engoldening, the gold of God's grace putting me back gently, one broken piece at a time

In that too-brightly lit, vast and crowded departure lounge I fell into a small, dark and lonely place inside. I prayed: *what did you say to me on this retreat, Lord?* And the answer came: *I am here for you, darling.* It was enough. *Okay*, I answered Him, *thank you, Lord. Holding on.* But surrender here does not mean passivity. It meant doing the necessary, oftentimes heart-rending work to heal, to cooperate with all the means that God sends. There were many other surrenders along the way. But what felt like the breaking was in reality the engoldening, the gold of God's grace putting me back gently, one broken piece at a time.

Trust is therefore crucial. Ultimately, we trust not so much in the process, which remains uncertain and elusive, but in Someone good and loving and faithful. Moreover, in God's marvelous providential arrangement, even trust is a gift we can ask for.



Kintsukuroi. God's cracked pot engoldened by God's grace. Those of us who struggle to live with faith in the light of a chronic disease know this truth deeply. Yet perhaps it is a symbol that holds true for everyone. In the memorable words of the playwright Eugene O'Neill: "Man is born broken. He lives by healing. God's grace is the glue." No one is immune, left unscathed by the vicissitudes of life. We all know brokenness. But we all have also been touched and engoldened by grace, by a love that enfolds us, tracing a shimmering path towards life.



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DUTERTE AND THE CHURCH: Reading Between the Lines

Ted Tuvera

"Hey you bystanders, when a bishop passes by, stage a holdup because he has lots of money... that son of a b***h! Kill those bishops there. They are useless."

Hearing Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's verbal thrusts against his perceived critics, including leaders of the Catholic Church, isn't really new as such has been an apparent routine in most - if not all - his usually spontaneous public speeches.

And no, his attacks against the Church aren't simply against its leaders as he would publicly vent his religious doubts irreverently. At a certain point, he called the God worshipped by Catholics as "stupid."

"Your God was nailed on the cross. F**k! How unimpressive," Mr. Duterte said in a speech in Kidapawan City last December 29, 2018. "I'm God and you will crucify me? Mother*****r. I'd tell them, 'Lightning, finish all of them. Burn all the non-believers.'"

Some do laugh, while others cringe and are mostly scandalized since no top state executive has ever dared mouth badly against the Catholic Church to which more than 80 percent of Filipinos belong - including Mr. Duterte himself, at least according to his official records.

To Mr. Duterte's credit, he has opened up these issues before public consciousness

However, Mr. Duterte remains to enjoy an overwhelming popularity compared to at least three of his predecessors despite brazenly ridiculing the Catholic faith which, as noted by the great Jesuit historian Fr. Horacio dela Costa, is one of the Filipino people's most precious treasures.

Poll firm Social Weather Stations (SWS), in its 2018 year-end survey released on December 28, 2018, reported that the public's satisfaction on the President's performance is still graded as "very good" as 74 percent of the 1,200 respondents from all over the country said so.

Historically speaking, the Catholic Church has been influential in shaping public opinion against state policies that are deemed contrary to its moral viewpoint. Notably, it was the voice of the late Archbishop of Manila Jaime Cardinal Sin that stirred people to mobilize at EDSA in February 1986 that ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos' 21-year regime.

But unlike Mr. Marcos whose public remarks about critical Church leaders of his period weren't as scandalous as Mr. Duterte's, it is worth exploring to see whether Church leaders are still influential amid the current administration's popularity despite the series of extrajudicial killings and continuous corruption attributed to the one who sits at the helm of state power.

In the midst of what might be observed as a tug-of-war of sorts, it is also but important to read between the lines: to understand where both sides of the story are coming from and to where they are grounded. For if it would merely be a constant mud-slinging, a boxing match of words, the public, the Filipino people, will just be caught in the crossfire, exposed vulnerably.

What the people need is, at least, a more objective and an educated understanding of the general issues so that it may discern well on where to stand, what to fight, live (and even die) for.

A morally corrupt Church?



Based on the frequency of Mr. Duterte's attacks against the Church, he is coming from a perspective that has long been an unarticulated critique of ordinary folks against Church leaders: corruption of funds by, and alleged sexual assaults perpetrated by clergymen, etc.

Mr. Duterte is coming from a perspective that has long been an unarticulated critique of ordinary folks against Church leaders: corruption of funds, alleged sexual assaults, etc

At hindsight, these concerns are real and valid, and involve questions of morality. To Mr. Duterte's credit, he has opened up these issues before public consciousness which has rightly emboldened people, especially the faithful, to speak up openly about the wrongdoings done by Church leaders.

Theology professor, activist and Jesuit Fr. Albert Alejo agrees that the basis of Mr. Duterte's rants against the Church are legitimate concerns confronting the institution, even shaking it.

"We cannot deny the fact that these (allegations against Church leaders) are happening," Fr. Alejo told *Tinig Loyola* in an interview, adding that such issues are indeed "slapping the core of our righteousness."

A very animated public speaker, Mr. Duterte would frequently flag the book *Altar of Secrets* written by the late journalist Aries Rufo which contains infamous stories of Filipino priests and even bishops living lavish lifestyles, physically and sexually abusing boys or girls, or having illicit romantic affairs contrary to living out celibate lives.

The President even challenged the clergy to refute the allegations scribbled by Rufo, which, among others, include a feature accusing Novaliches Bishop emeritus Teodoro Bacani of committing indiscretions against a female secretary which allegedly forced him into an early retirement from his post.

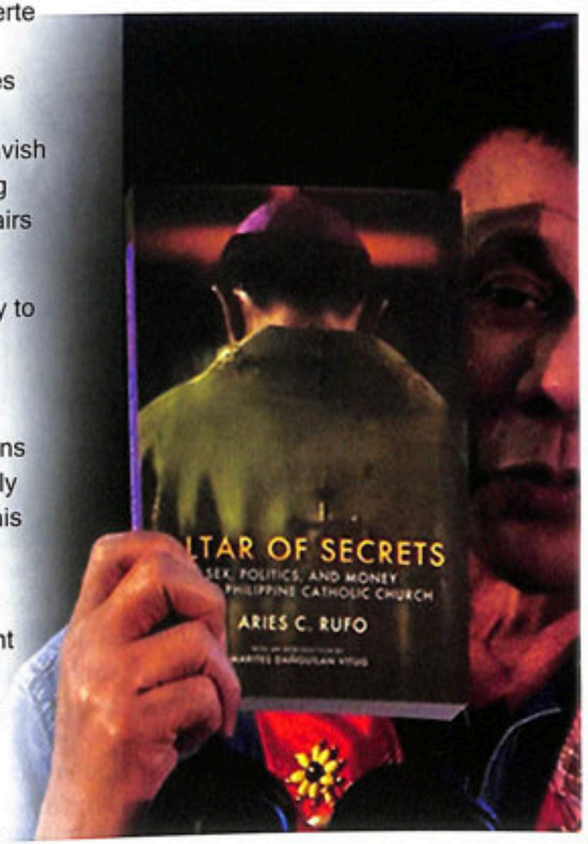
Bishop Bacani, who stands as one of the vocal Church leaders critical of the current administration, has become one of Mr. Duterte's verbal punching bags, who has accused him of having two wives.

Saying that he accordingly "aches for reforms" in the Church, Rufo also named other prominent Church personalities in reports about financial mismanagement, ecclesiastical politicking and physical misconducts on seminarians.

Fr. Alejo, who was personally acquainted with the deceased journalist, said that the said book endorsed by no less than the President contain stories that are rooted in facts.

However, he said that the way Mr. Duterte presents the *Altar of Secrets* isn't what the author intended it to be.

"What Aries wanted and hoped for was reforms in the Church," Fr. Alejo said, noting that it seems to him that Mr. Duterte has other and deeper political intentions as to why he keeps on berating the Church.



The Church and Malacañang through the years

Since the time of the dictator Marcos, Church leaders have been politically active whenever it seems necessary to do so.

Perhaps it was during the infamous raid at the Sacred Heart Jesuit Novitiate in Novaliches, Quezon City in August 24, 1974 that a turning point in the Church's political stance on the nationwide imposed martial law happened.

Then Philippine Jesuit provincial superior Fr. Benigno Mayo was held in question due to suspicions that fugitive Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) leader Jose Maria Sison may have been harbored by Jesuits, thus the search that broke the silence kept inside the usually serene Jesuit formation and retreat house.

The raid yielded the arrests of Fr. Jose Blanco, SJ, who was said to be a leader of an anti-government organization, and a number of youth leaders belonging to the group Student Catholic Action (SCA).

It was a turning point, indeed, as the said search broke the Church's silence and as well the anti-Marcos protest movement's silence during martial law as about 5,000 religious, laity, students and workers attended the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP)-led demonstration vigil at the Manila Cathedral on September 1, 1974.

It was the first time that then Manila Archbishop Cardinal Sin publicly denounced the Marcos regime and thus came the recognition that the Church was a political force to reckon with.

Twelve years later, it was Cardinal Sin's voice aired over the radio that helped in summoning crowds to join in the military stand-off in EDSA which ultimately sealed the end of the Marcos dictatorship.


Photo Credits: inquirer.net

Corazon Aquino, who is identified as someone close to the Church, being herself a devout Catholic, replaced Mr. Marcos as President.

It may be generalized that Mrs. Aquino did not have any major opposition from the Church, but Fr. Alejo recalled that there were Church leaders who challenged her after the brutal Mendiola Massacre of January 1987 that saw the deaths of 13 farm-workers who marched from Tarlac to Manila, demanding the genuine implementation of agrarian reform in Hacienda Luisita of which the first lady-president was a stock-holder.

Mrs. Aquino's critics would even assail her of being too favorable to the Catholic Church as manifested in the policies forwarded by her administration.

Moreover, the Catholic Church had a well-meaning relationship with the country's first non-Catholic president Fidel Ramos who has hosted in the Philippines the largest World Youth Day celebration attended by Pope John Paul II in 1995.

Despite having a number of concubines - for which he was criticized as a presidential aspirant - actor-turned-politician Joseph 'Erap' Estrada weathered warnings from a number of Church leaders of his time for his image that contradicted Catholic moral ideals when he was elected as President.

However, Mr. Estrada - who was caught with corruption and immoral charges - endured the same fate that Mr. Marcos had. Still, with Cardinal Sin in the frontlines, Mr. Estrada was ejected through another EDSA revolt in January 2001 that made Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, a devout Catholic, president.

Journalist Alexis Romero, who has been covering the Malacañang Palace for more than 10 years, observes that



"Definitely Mrs. Arroyo kowtows to the stand of the Catholic Church," Romero, who reports for the *Philippine Star*, told *Tinig Loyola* in an interview, recalling how she was applauded by Church leaders for her refusal to pass the controversial Reproductive Health bill and her position against death penalty which was welcomed by no less than Pope emeritus Benedict XVI.

While Mrs. Aquino was accused of favoring the Church through her policies, Mrs. Arroyo was similarly assailed of giving out material favors to bishops particularly the purported *Pajeros* received by a handful of bishops through the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO).

The incumbent President's predecessor, Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino III may appear not as devout as his mother was and could considerably be described as a "nominal Catholic."

It was in Mr. Aquino's time that the controversial Reproductive Health Bill, renamed as the Responsible Parenthood Act, was passed. There were also instances that he would take subtle jabs at Church

In fact, when Pope Francis visited Manila in 2015, Mr. Aquino made a political statement against the clergy's supposed "silence" against "[Mrs. Arroyo's] abuses."

Duterte-inspired "reforms" for the Church?

Remarkably, though, Mr. Duterte's top mouthpiece and legal counsel Salvador Panelo said that the President's "colorful" and "dramatic" statements against the Church is accordingly rooted from his wish to make "reforms inside the Catholic Church."

But Fr. Alejo noted that if Mr. Duterte's really interested in doing religious reforms, he should also do the same toward other religious groups that, in one way or another, may also be faced with corruption issues.

"The President is so selective," Fr. Alejo said, saying that Mr. Duterte does not have the guts to confront two religious groups that have been under fire due to financial issues.

Fr. Alejo, who was once assigned in Mr. Duterte's hometown Davao City, explained that the two influential religious groups remain scot-free amid allegations of power-tripping perpetrated by its leaders - who, though in different ways, claim divine rights - because of the bloc-votes and financial support it promised and gave him during his presidential bid in 2016.

One of the claims that Mr. Duterte as to why he tends to be passionate in attacking the Church is his own bad experience at the hands of a priest back in childhood.

In a number of speeches, the President recounts that he was "molested" by a deceased American Jesuit priest who, other reports suggest, had had other sex abuse victims in the United States.

"It was a case of fondling - you know what - he did during confession, that's how we lost our innocence early," Mr. Duterte said back in 2015, noting that the incident happened to him back when he was probably 14 or 15 years old high school freshman at the Ateneo de Davao.



However, journalist Romero, who have closely monitored Mr. Duterte's rise to power, detects otherwise, noting the apparent trend that triggers him to bad mouth the Catholic Church.

"President Duterte's outbursts [against the Catholic Church], I think, stem from his hatred toward bishops who criticize his controversial drug war which he sees as undue interference to state affairs," Romero said.

"It seems to me that Mr. Duterte really wants to prove that his critics are not credible enough to talk to him," he added.

Nonetheless, Romero cited that while Mr. Duterte may be oozing with bravado whenever he's in public, there are still a number of observable proofs that he may have a different private persona that can be spiritual.

"Podium Duterte may be different from the private Duterte," he said, adding that while the 73-year-old President may make claims that he's not a Catholic anymore, it seems that its inconsistent as to how he may act in private.

"He keeps a crucifix and an image of the Divine Mercy in his room. He still attends Catholic ceremonies such as weddings and baptisms," he added.

Romero recalls what Mr. Duterte's daughter, Davao City mayor Sara Duterte, said of his father's recent attacks and apparent mockery of God and other fundamental Christian beliefs: "Do not listen to him. He is not a religion teacher."

But despite such claims, Romero noted that perhaps the real motivation behind Mr. Duterte's profanity-laced tirades against the Church has something to do with apparent sensitivity toward criticisms.

The Church's credibility and prophetic role

Mr. Duterte and his apologists keep on insisting that his harsh remarks on the Catholic hierarchy are but clear indicators of his belief that criticism coming from Church leaders tows the line that separates the Church and the State.

Also, the valid albeit exaggerated jabs done by the President on the Church, at hindsight, would really appear to be crippling on the latter's credibility as a righteous critic. Mr. Duterte would often say that Church bishops do not have the moral ascendancy to denounce him.

However, the Church, as an important institution in society, has the right to speak up whenever it has and that the government cannot simply undermine it, Romero stressed.

"Any presidential statement or state policy has its moral dimensions," he said, adding that "whenever the Church speaks, it does not necessarily violate the State and Church separation principle."

Romero, on the other hand, noted that as far as the current political dynamics works, it would be "almost impossible to mobilize people the way Cardinal Sin did before" if overthrowing Mr. Duterte is concerned and that there's some sort of a "collective fatigue" over EDSA people power uprisings.

True enough, recent demonstrations initiated by Church groups are not that huge.

"It seems to me that Mr. Duterte really wants to prove that his critics are not credible enough to talk to him," he added.

And after all, Mr. Duterte remains to be popular as far as surveys are concerned.

But for activist Fr. Alejo, the Church must stand up to its prophetic role even if such a position isn't popular and even if the Church has its own closeted skeletons.

Also an anthropologist, Fr. Alejo said that he is not a hundred percent convinced with what poll firms are trying to project saying that ordinary people he has encountered - especially in urban poor communities - who were once avid supporters of Mr. Duterte are convinced that his administration has really screwed up with its promises.

The Church must stand up to its prophetic role even if such a position isn't popular and even if the Church has its own closeted skeletons

For the Church to stand and fight social evils is not a matter of whether our leaders are credible or not. The Church's prophetic role is a responsibility," he said, stating that such prophetic role must be fulfilled even if it is not what appears to be popular.

"Remember that it was also popular among the crowds of his time to chant the conviction and crucifixion of Jesus. And that even the likes of Mama Mary, John and Mary Magdalene were few, yet they remained firm with what was right, who, in the end, turned out to be glorious?" Fr. Alejo pointed out.

Fr. Alejo, along with rather activists, also admit that playing the prophetic role exposes one to a lot of risks.

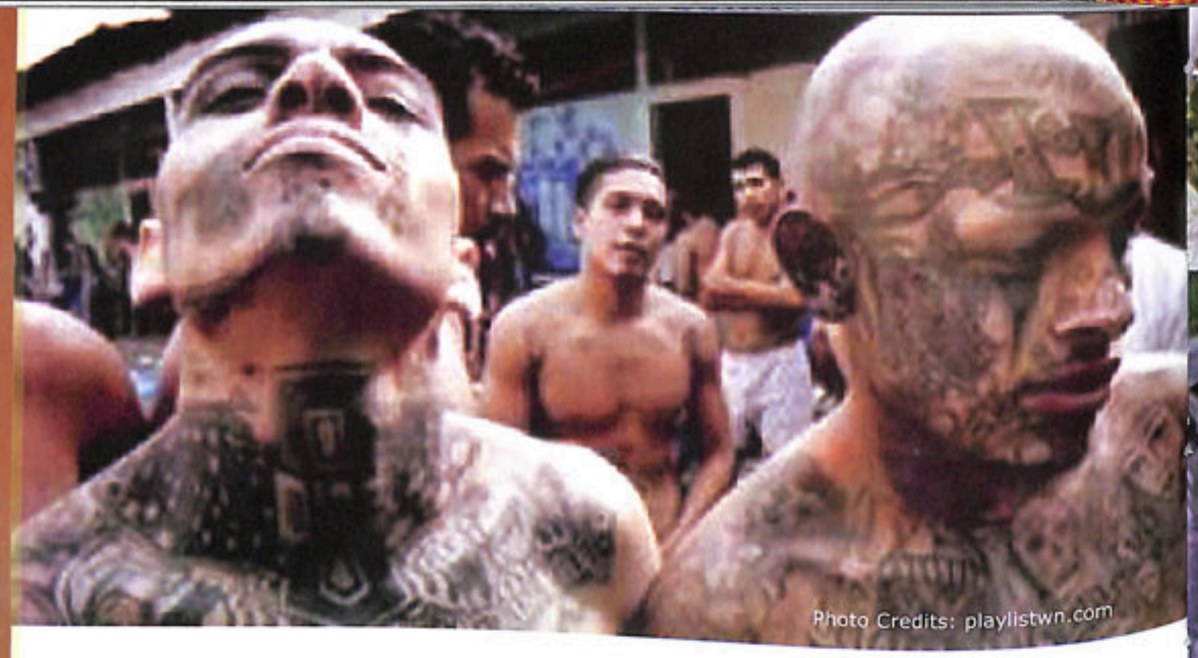
And notably so, there has been an observed trend towards those who appear to be critical against Mr. Duterte.

Female personalities like detained Senator Leila de Lima, former Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, Australian missionary nun Patricia Fox and journalist Maria Ressa, in one way or another, made statements or efforts critical of the administration.

After their doing so, Mr. Duterte would react and eventually do a series of presidential exposés that possibly shame and imperil their credibility through legalistic technicalities.



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Furthermore, Mr. Duterte recently made a pronouncement encouraging bystanders to rob and kill Catholic bishops for accordingly speaking ill of him.

Unfortunately, there's some sort of an effect whenever Mr. Duterte makes threats. It's as if they are magic curses as they do happen - especially the "killing" part - to those whom he perceive as against him and against his ideals.

"Remember when he threatened to kill drug addicts? What happened? Many suspected addicts were killed. Now that he's threatening to have priests or bishops killed, do we have any reason not to take such threats seriously?" Fr. Alejo emphatically said.

"It's as if being aware of the evils in society and as if standing up as a peace-loving Filipino citizen is now a risk in itself," he added, noting that "risks are not excuses for cowardice."

AM+DG



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"WE ARE NOT AFRAID..."

| Lemuel Paul Tuvilla, CMF

A Stronger Church Amidst the Priest Killings

Dedicating *El Filibusterismo*, one of his greatest works, to the memory of the GOMBURZA, Dr. Jose Rizal wrote: "...let these pages serve as belated wreath of dried leaves laid on your unknown graves: and may your blood be upon the hands of those who, without sufficient proof, assail your memory."

On February 17, 1872, fear and rage filled the hearts of many Filipinos as they witnessed Fathers Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora (GOMBURZA), walk towards the *garrote* and their death. This day was indeed an unfortunate day not only for the three priests unjustly accused of subversion but also for all the Filipinos who witnessed their dreadful deaths. It may had been a necessary evil, as some describe it, for the awakening of many Filipinos who were asleep for years, turning deaf ears to the evils that the Spanish Occupation brought, yet behind all gratitude for the positive effects of the priests' deaths is the tragic reality that those who truly fought for what is right met an unjust accusation and condemnation.

GOMBURZA were known to be reformers who fought for changes in how the Church was run. They made use of education in their campaign to fight against the injustices experienced by Filipino priests: they struggled to the promotion of the rights of the native clergy to be assigned to the parishes, rights that were denied them, and enjoyed instead by the regular Spanish clergy. In doing so began the stirrings of a nascent

Filipino nationalism and consciousness. This made them *filibusteros* or agitators in the eyes of the government. Their deaths were the result of an unfounded accusation linking them to the Cavite Mutiny with which they had nothing to do. Their courage and determination were indeed a cry for change yet in the end, it brought them to their unjust deaths. But their deaths became a ripple that awakened many Filipinos from their apathy, from their silent suffering.

December 4, 2017. In Jaen, Nueva Ecija, on his way home, Fr. Marcelino "Tito" Paez was shot dead by motorcycle-riding assailants.

Fr. Tito Paez, a former parish priest in Guimba and coordinator of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines in Central Luzon, was a staunch defender of human rights and the coordinator of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines in Central Luzon. Before his untimely death, he had just facilitated the release of Rommel Tucay, a political prisoner. San Jose Bishop Robert Mallari described his death not only as a sacrifice offered as a priest but also as a comrade. His supporters attested to his life of service which was manifested even unto death.



April 29, 2018. After the Eucharistic celebration, while blessing the children, Fr. Mark Ventura was mercilessly gunned down in Gattaran, Cagayan.

Fr. Mark Anthony Ventura of the Diocese of Tuguegarao, setting aside all the scandals now being tied to his name, was a zealous priest and missionary to the poor and the marginalized. With the destruction of natural resources of Cagayan due to mining, he was one of the great advocates against such activities, condemning those who were behind their prevalence despite the many petitions for their termination.

June 10, 2018. The blood of Fr. Richmond Nilo was spilled at the altar of a small chapel in Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija after being shot by still unidentified hitmen.

Is it mere coincidence or is it a repetition of that unfortunate event in Philippine history that took the lives of GOMBURZA?

The three priests who were killed dedicated most of their priestly life to helping the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. In the course of their ministry, they unavoidably may have gained many enemies, enemies who, because of their selfish desires, chose to pursue money and power, sacrificing the more important values of peace and justice.

Fr. Richmond Nilo, a parish priest of the Diocese of Cabanatuan, was active in the apostolate with the deaf and the mute. Rather than remain indifferent to the injustices caused by the campaign of the government, he was an outspoken critic against injustices in the war on drugs.

After their brutal murders, described by Bishop Sofronio Bancud as "not only



unchristian and inhuman; [but] also un-Filipino", questions arose: Why were they killed? Who were the masterminds of the murders? And, as Senator Risa Hontiveros asks, were their deaths the result of President Duterte's hatred for the clergy, as manifested by his repeated attacks and tirades against them? `

The deaths of Frs. Paez, Ventura, and Nilo have been a great blow to the Philippine Church. With three of its beloved pastors brutally killed, the Church has been in a state of grief yet of courage and determination. Its priests continue to hold on to their role as pastors: a "consistent moral compass" as the social advocacy network Philippine Misereor Partnership, Inc. (PMPI) puts it. Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates Villegas, together with leaders in his Archdiocese released a statement regarding this ill-fated turn of events, saying, "We are not afraid. We trust in the Lord. We are ready to battle for God's honor. They want to bury us priests. But they forget that we priests are seeds. When you bury us, we will grow more and flourish. You cannot stop the Gospel from growing. You cannot stop God from being God. You cannot muzzle the voice of truth."

Bishop Ambo David of Kalookan, addressing seminarians who may have been discouraged by these current events, stated: "If a priest is murdered because he defends human rights, like Father Tito Paez, or he speaks out for environmental protection, like Father Mark Ventura, or he protects victims of rape and defends the Catholic Church, like Father Richmond Nilo, and his death causes you discouragement instead of inspiration, then I advise you to forget the priesthood and leave as soon as you can... The Priesthood is not for cowards; it is not for the fainthearted." Despite the fears and trembling that their

deaths have caused many, despite the reality that those who stand for the truth sometimes end up being rebuked, hated, or even killed, their deaths have become proof that the Church continues to stand true to its identity of being for the Truth. Despite all the scandals that have stained its image, the Church continues to live the life of fighting for the truth, of standing for the truth like Christ.

These slain priests are indeed martyrs, though perhaps not in the way the early Christian martyrs have died, fighting for the right to practice their faith. Yet they too have died to fight for the truth that they believe in -



faith in the love for God, for neighbor, for all creation. Indeed, as Bishop David says: "It is not their deaths but the way the three priests lived out their vocation that proves their martyrdom."

The death of the GOMBURZA paved the way for the propaganda movements to rise. In a similar way, may the deaths of these three beloved pastors not only end up in the tolling of bells but also bring forth inspiration to many - most especially to bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, the religious, the lay, and all Catholics - so that they may remember that the life of a Catholic is not a life of being accustomed to the peace that this world brings, nor turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to all the injustices and oppression in our society. The life of a Catholic is a life of



standing and fighting for what is right, the truth that every creature is special and needs to be treated with respect, ,that we are all connected to each other, and that our actions affect others.

But more than the personal level is the reality of our being creatures of God. We were created and are continuously created out of the love of God, freely and in an orderly manner; we are by nature good, and thus have an inalienable dignity as persons. God fashioned us dearly in the wombs of our mothers, and we have done nothing to deserve his love that brought us to existence What, then, gives us the right to take away something that was created apart from us yet just like us? Who are we, then, to take away the life that has been borne out of an eternal love? Who are we to be judges who can decide whose lives to keep and whose to take away? Who are we but mere creatures: creatures who are only a breath, yet think that we can play God? God created us not only for ourselves but also for others; we are





to help him create and re-create, not destroy.

This is no longer just about killing priests, but also about the fact that nowadays, taking away a life is as easy as just picking up a flower beside the road. If only we would all realize and keep in mind the dignity of each person, killing would not be an option. Fathers Paez, Ventura, and Nilo died for the truth, and fought for what is right, but they were seen as not more than mere animals that could easily be killed. As Catholics, we do not only fight for the lives of our priests but we fight for all people, people with God-given dignity. More than the social-political issues that our beloved priests fought for, this is the underlying truth that they were fighting for, the sacredness of life; in the end, what they were fighting for was cruelly taken away from them.

Did they regret their actions? I definitely think they didn't.

The GOMBURZA and Fathers Paez, Ventura and Nilo stood for this truth and in the end, they must have realized that laying down their lives was inevitable. They must have realized that like Jesus, in upholding and defending the true value of life and its sacredness, they must give their lives so that others may live. It was not a contradiction but an affirmation of that same love that brought all into being, a love that gives everything for the sake of the beloved.

As students of this institution, we too are invited to do the



same. I realize that this article should not only be an exposition and reflection of their lives but also an opportunity to learn from them. We are asked or invited to study, not only to learn theology, to get good grades, to have a degree, but to realize that at the end of the day, all these lessons would be pointless if these would not become part of our lives. For sure, Fathers Paez, Nilo, and Ventura studied their theology diligently; but more than that, they lived out their theology, which brought them to fight for the truth, in their faithfulness to the Truth, who is Jesus Christ. They may have died in a very tragic way, but they died to fight for the very people whom Jesus Christ had fought for. We too are all invited to stand up and continue the fight.



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"LOVE IS OUR TRUE DESTINY": Thomas Merton on Holiness

Michael George Villasis

"Rejoice and be glad!" So begins Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today's World, more commonly known by its Latin incipit, *Gaudete et exsultate*. The Holy Father begins with these words of Jesus to highlight that a life of holiness is ultimately not one of sadness and sorrow, though one may pass through these steps. Rather, the life we are all called to is one that brings incomparable joy and happiness, a life truly well lived, for others, rather than a "bland and mediocre existence" (*Gaudete et exsultate* [GE] 1).

In the Pope's Address to the United States Congress on the occasion of his Apostolic Visit, among the four outstanding Americans he mentioned was a Trappist monk, poet, and mystic: Thomas Merton (1915-1968). For the Pope, Merton continues to be "a source of spiritual inspiration and a guide for many people." Thus, Merton, the spiritual master, could also be our guide in trying to live out the call to holiness today.

And by no coincidence, Merton also has at the center of his thought and writings on holiness the incomparable joy of following the Lord. Indeed, for him, holiness is an abandonment with "confident joy" to our Crucified Lord; thus we could still lovingly trust in him despite our own weaknesses and mistakes, and the blows and misfortunes of life.

What follows is a rough sketch of some of Father Merton's thoughts on holiness in today's world, what it consists of, and how it is to be achieved.

Is Holiness Loneliness?

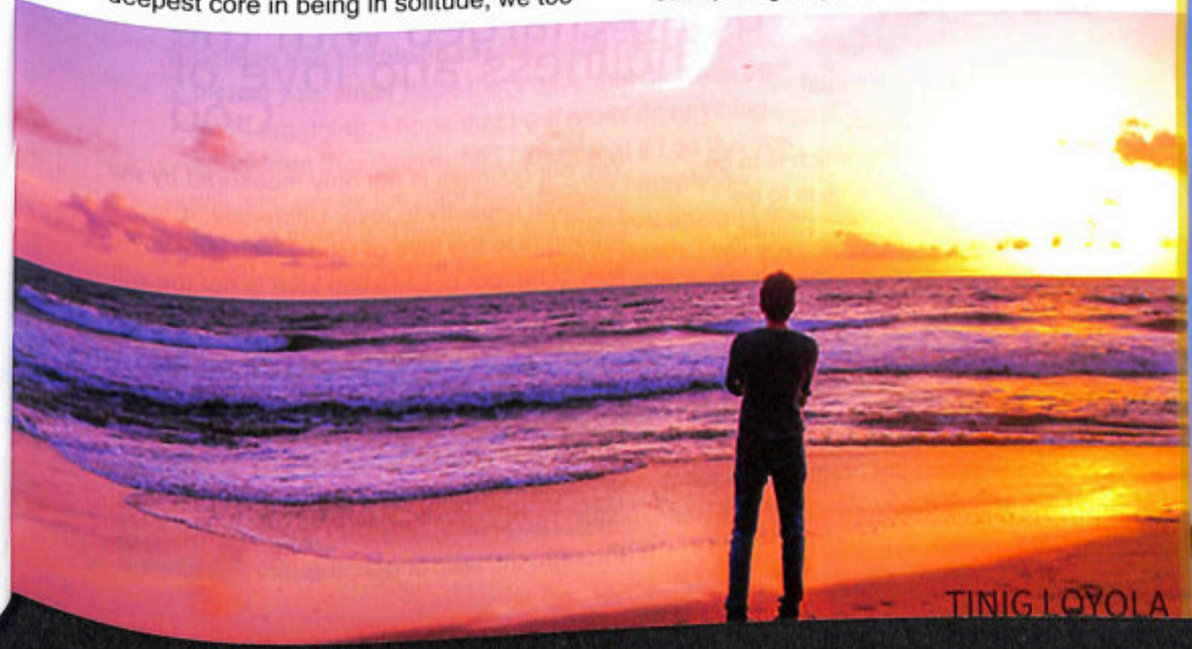
One stereotype of the saint is the lone wolf: one who is constantly alone, comfortable with living in solitude, performing many acts of penance, and spending countless hours of prayer and meditation in the secret of his or her inner room. In some respects, this is true, and accurate. One cannot proceed on the road to holiness without having a connection with God, a connection strengthened in silence and prayer, a connection which knows also how to withdraw from the crowd to face God alone in all nakedness and truth. Merton writes that we ought to face God in our own deserts, even in the midst of the "wilderness" of today's world. In these deserts, we learn how to depend on God alone, learning to fight against despair at our own poverty and helplessness.

But even if our call to holiness is a call to solitude, it is not to be confused with loneliness or isolation. Even as Merton praises the importance of solitude in the spiritual life, he too warns against a false solitude that is really only isolation. This isolation is one that seems to say, "I am apart from everyone because I am special, because of my own special identity." On the other hand, there is the tendency to withdraw, not from the crowd, but *into it*, where we are lost in a mass of individuals, and do not consent to do our duty for others.

In contrast, true solitude that leads to a life of holiness is one that unites us to each other. When we discover our freedom at our deepest core in being in solitude, we too discover that our solitude is not our personal property, but one that is common to everyone. We discover the uniqueness of everyone, loved by God in their own right. Our solitude therefore invites us to realize that we are all connected in our own uniqueness in the "common ground of love".

Our solitude should coincide with loving service

The challenge therefore is to maintain this solitude in spite of the busy-ness of everyday life, in the course of doing our ordinary work. The challenge is not to withdraw absolutely from others, but to discover them and love them more profoundly in our own solitude, and then to reach out and minister to them. It is, as *Gaudete et exsultate* states, a "spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and service (GE 31)." Or to quote Merton, "The spiritual life is not a life of quiet withdrawal... beyond the reach of people living ordinary lives. It is in the ordinary duties and labors of life that a Christian can and should develop his spiritual union with God." Our solitude should coincide with the loving service we ought to perform for each other, not go against it. This is holiness.



TINIG LOYOLA

Is Holiness Self-Destruction?

Holiness is associated with a self-emptying that sometimes seems to border on self-destruction. Indeed, self-effacing love often is taken to mean self-erasing love: we ought to destroy all that is ours for the sake of the other. Again, this is true in some respects, for holiness implies self-sacrifice, and self-denial, so that we could grow in holiness and love for God and neighbor.



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But holiness for Thomas Merton can never be a destruction of the self. He criticizes the stereotyped image of the plaster saint, who seems to be holy, yet does not know how to be human. To add, for him, a "morbid self-hatred is not a good sign in the spiritual life, and neither is a dualistic understanding of the body, which is to be destroyed, and the soul, which is to be preserved (*Life and Holiness*). Rather, holiness starts from our own distinct personalities and identities, for it is only in our uniqueness could we even begin to discover the unique will of God for us. "For me, to be a saint means to be myself," he writes. "Therefore, the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self (*New Seeds of Contemplation*)."

What holiness destroys is not the self, but the false self, our idealized image of ourselves that needs to be broken so we could discover our true self, the one known and willed by God. It is in this sense that we ought to be self-sacrificing and surrendering, for in learning to let go of these illusions, we paradoxically find who we truly are. It is this going beyond the tension between what I am now and what I ought to be that helps us grow in sanctity.

"Love is our true destiny"

With all that has been said, one more idea remains key to Thomas Merton's writings on holiness: love. For him, "love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another (*Love and Living*)." The journey of discovering others and ourselves at our deepest is a journey of love: love for one's self, love for others, and love for God. And thus we go back to *Gaudete et exsultate*, for instead of mediocrity, the life of holiness we aspire to is one that is enflamed and kindled by love and joy.

Holiness consists in being charged with the holiness and love of God

Yet, our holiness is not only measured by our personal capacity to love. Ultimately, it redounds to the love of God which is always first: "The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but the faith that one is loved (*New Seeds of Contemplation*)." Thus, more than realizing that we ourselves are holy, holiness consists in being charged with the holiness and love of God. It is not we who make ourselves holy, and nor do we shine our own light. The saint is one who lets the light shine through; the less of him, the more of God.

What is therefore important in our pursuit of holiness is not a dependence on our own talents, but a loving trust in God. The more we advance in the spiritual life, per Merton, the more it costs us, for we realize that we are far from the perfect humans we think we are; we are all too human with our inconsistencies and weaknesses, our mistakes and sins. But even as we realize this, we are drawn more towards God, without whom we could do nothing (cf. *Life and Holiness*).

Ultimately, for Merton, holiness begins and ends in a loving trust in someone who is mysterious but who is Love (cf. *New Seeds of Contemplation*). It is the beginning, because his love is that which allows us to love, and to reflect his holiness. It is the end, because our love is incomplete until it reaches its Source, where love is perfected and can begin anew. And because it is Love that guides and draws us, even in the storms and travails of life, when we think there seems to be no way out of the darkness of our own failings, and no help seems to be near, we can be confident that through this Love which loved us first, the first rays of light can shine through, no matter how insignificant they may seem. Thus could Father Merton pray (and here we end our short reflection):

> My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone (*Thoughts in Solitude*).

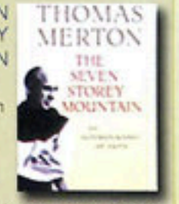


Michael George "Macky" Villasis is a seminarian of the Diocese of Novaliches, and in his second year of theology at LST.

Three books that could get you started on Thomas Merton

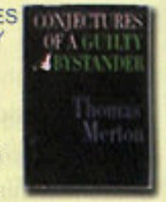
Thomas Merton was a prolific writer, leaving behind countless books, essays, poems, and letters. It could then be a daunting task to begin to read him. Here are three recommended books that could help readers begin to be acquainted with him and his inspirational writings.

THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN



Hailed as a modern-day version of the Confessions of St. Augustine, this is the autobiography of Merton from his turbulent early life to gradual conversion and eventual entry into the Cistercian (Trappist) Abbey of our Lady of Gethsemani. It is full of insight and drama on the turnabout he experienced, as well as the mystery of his call to the monastic life, plus some very poignant poems.

CONJECTURES OF A GUILTY BYSTANDER

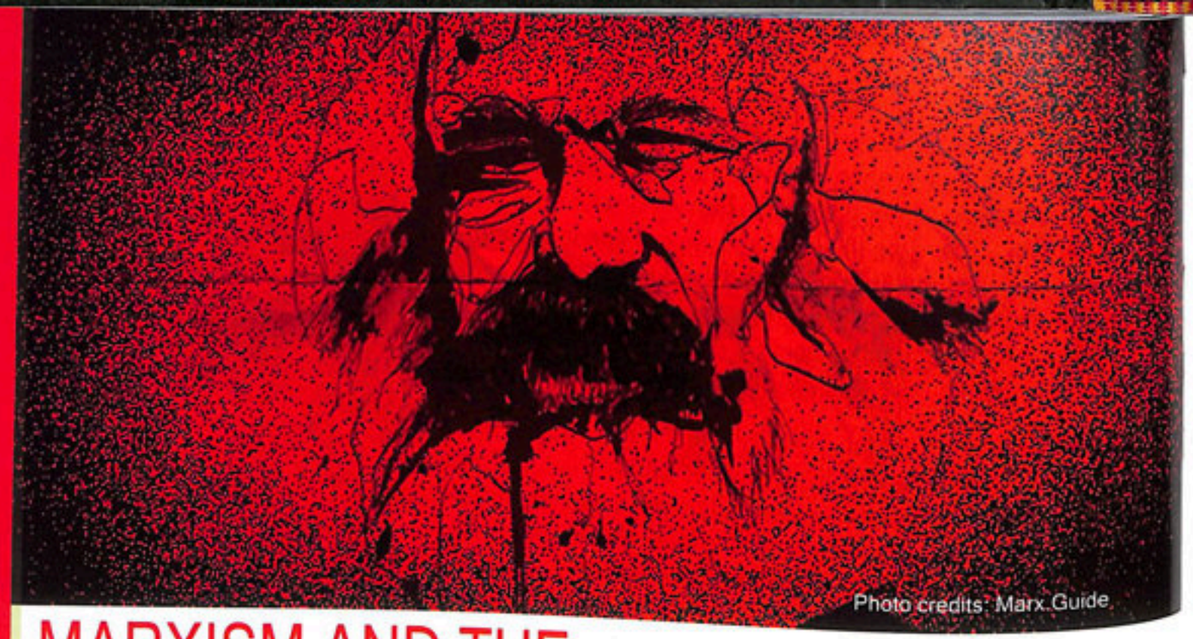


If his autobiography serves as a glimpse into his calling, this journal chronicling the later years of his monastic life paints a picture of his discovery of his "vocation within a vocation." Merton, as shown in these pages, would gradually understand that his calling to be a monk was also one that called for his involvement in the affairs of a world gradually overtaken by the threat of nuclear war and violence.

NEW SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION



Although contemplation could be an intimidating word, Merton gently unpacks in this book, piece by piece, what Christian contemplation is, and how it is a common calling to all of us. One of Merton's most loved books, it is less a dry treatise on the nature of contemplation, or a field manual for achieving contemplation properly, and more a dynamic and illustrative rendering of our spiritual journey towards the loving God.


Photo credits: Marx Guide

MARXISM AND THE CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW REVISITED

Ted Tuvera

It's as if a spectre is haunting the consciousness of the young: the spectre of Marxism.

2018 marked the 200th birth anniversary of Karl Marx, arguably Europe's most influential thinker in the last two centuries, whose revolutionary ideas challenged institutions and their respective worldviews since the publication of his classic works that history works to weed out what judgments it ought to pronounce over an enormous legacy.

It can be agreed that Marxist thought provoked ideas that transcended mere academic discourses as it has established regimes with ideals on social equality. Though such ideals led to bloodshed, a number of political movements in (what are classified as) "third-world" nations - especially in Asia and Latin America - remain to invoke his maxims along with red banners and long-barrelled guns.

In the last 50 years, when the Church was still trying to make sense of the revolutionary Second Vatican Council, theologians immersed in the signs of the times flirted with Marxism albeit its anti-religion, atheistic theses. They believed it offered an analysis, a worldview that seems to articulate the obvious: there's a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the former maximize all its capacities to widen the gap, thus oppressing the latter.

In recent decades, however, the question of subscribing to Marxist attitudes has been partially settled - especially so after the dispersal of the Soviet Union - and conclusions were made: The institutional Church can never pontificate Marxism.

Surprisingly, though, even those who are perceived as "conservative" and "capitalist" or "neoliberal" media organizations concede that a renewed interest in Marx and in socialism is on the rise.

As the Church of today seeks to build bridges in what used to be controversial areas, taking another look or perhaps reviewing the possibilities of reconciling Marxist and Catholic worldviews deserve a shot for in so far as tantum quantum, isn't it true that all things can be reconciled in Christ?

MARX AND RELIGION

"Die Religion ... ist das Opium des Volkes." (Religion is the opium of the masses).

Marx's critique of religion, although not originally his, evolved through the years as it has been elaborated by other thinkers who, implicitly or explicitly, used the lens of Marx and Friedrich Engels in his 1884 treatise The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.

Using a historical materialist framework, the Marxist view of religion is that it is a product of humanity's evolution from mere primitive nomads who at the beginning had a concept of ownership or property and sought means to protect or preserve it as theirs. This purpose, gave birth to the idea of a "family" - and, eventually, a "state."

Religion served as a moralizing agent for oppression in Marx's milieu

And what role does religion play here? Religion, more than an affiliation that we generally know of today, served hand in hand with the state and its laws so as to justify its sense of morals which, of course, favors the interest of humanity's earliest oppressors.

In other words, religion served as a moralizing agent for oppression during Marx's milieu (and to a certain extent, even today).


Photo Credits: Adoremus Bulletin

Most atheists today would agree and add that the concept of "God" is but an opiate-generated idea meant to console humanity in their material burdens, pontificate a mythical projection so as to justify some irrational morals, provide a passive understanding of the origins of the universe and humanize the mysteries that remain as absolute abstracts yet to be canonized by science.

Influenced by the philosophical ideas of Georg Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach, Marx used the lens of dialectical materialism to view universal movements. This means that his thought was limited to matter, that which can be observed empirically. Thus metaphysics and other Platonic perspectives were severely decided as impractical and insignificant.

For Marx, what governs the universe is the law of contradiction. In a word: dialectics. This means that the governing law behind the laws of nature are contradictions which led to further contradictions. This philosophical insight justified the need for revolutions once applied to political realities.

Dialectical materialism, as far as Marxists are concerned, deny the universal belief in religious traditions that everything is based

on a Supreme Being's will. Such perspective also denies the atheistic thought that everything in the universe are random accidents because any contradictions or conflicts would definitely yield new realities.

Conventional theistic and perhaps Christian reasoning would argue that while natural movements are manifested materially, the mere fact that there is an invisible law - the law of contradiction - governing matter does not necessarily deny the existence of a Supreme Being or a creative will beyond what can be observed empirically. This same line of thinking has also been invoked in faith-science debates such as in approaches to the Darwinian Theory on the evolution of man.

While Marx suggested the abolition of religion, he however stated in an 1843 critique on Hegel that "suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering [and that] religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions."

Apart from his philosophical musings, obviously, Marx's religious critique was primarily directed at the institutional Catholic Church and other Christian institutions of his time.

Reality tells us that Christian churches at that time were collaborating with European states that colonized other places in the world. In many ways, this colonization dehumanized native cultures and identities contrary to what was expected as far as Gospel values are concerned. On a parochial level, Church leaders of that time were mostly associated with the rich - the bourgeoisie - who held state, military and judicial powers that protracted injustice among the poor. In this aspect, Marx's anti-religious sentiment could be somewhat justified.

Marx's brand of politics and economics are, in hindsight, no different from those of the rest of the revolutionary thinkers before him for all of them seem to offer liberation from the shackles of oppression that has haunted those at the margins of civilization throughout the centuries: the slaves, the peasants, and the proletariat.

What makes Marx stand out is that his project is thoroughly backed by reasonable cues from economics, sociology, history, philosophy and the natural sciences. Also, in carrying out this project of liberation, he was so passionate about it that he engaged workers in dialogues at pubs over beer - up to the point that his ideas influenced French workers to launch a "socialist revolution" - and thus establishing a government dubbed as the "Paris Commune of 1871" which lasted for about three months.

Colonization dehumanized native cultures and identities contrary to what was expected as far as Gospel values are concerned

Marxist ideas ended up spreading through the vast territory that the ambitious Napoleon Bonaparte failed to seize - Russia - where a communist power lasted through two world wars in the previous century.

Marxism has this messianic appeal which emboldens and empowers the oppressed to seize state powers and establish regimes that, ideally, would promote social, political and economic equality among peoples that have long been under unjust and oppressive systems.

Marxism holds this same appeal today, especially among the youth, even if its ideology has produced ruthless dictators in the previous centuries.

US-based online magazine Teen Vogue - whose audience are primarily made up of millennials - published in May 2018 an article that praises Marx and affirms his revolutionary thought. It even acknowledges that young people are taking a renewed interest in Marxist ideas and a positive look at socialism.



Photo Credits: www.laineygossip.com

Why is this so?

Perhaps explaining such renewed interest would demand a lengthier academic discourse, but for the benefit of this article, some general presumptions could be made about the social conditions that demand a revolution of sorts and humanity's search for solutions to their millennium-old problems, among others.

PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

Since the epoch of Marxism, the Catholic Church has been denying the errors of some of Marxist teachings yet institutionally hesitant to attribute to Marx certain perspectives that hold some truth.

What made Marx and his ideas relevant during his lifetime and beyond was that he offered not only an alternative but also a solution - a well-thought-out and grounded one - to the woes of the masses.

And Marx's ideas were quite convincing.

For Marx, history has been a cycle of class-struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the slave-owner and the slave, the feudal lord and the peasant - in other words, the oppressor and the oppressed.

Simply put, the oppressors or the ruling class are at the helm of political, economic and cultural powers over the oppressed. And it isn't difficult to explain how "class struggle" works especially if we are illustrating it through a real-life parable.

A multinational food-service company earns tens of millions a day yet only pays its employees a measly 380 PHP a day (which is way below the minimum wage). On top of this, this company only has a hundred regular employees out of more than a thousand and makes them work for 12 to 16 hours under hazardous conditions.

The workers go on strike, get dispersed violently with the help of state security, and ended up being accused as "criminals."

This incident is not something alien in the Philippines or in any parts of the world. This reality provides us with a space to consider that what Marx had to say convinced people of the necessity to revolt in the name of social justice.

The social teachings of the Church, as well as liberation theology, share some concerns articulated by Marxism. No wonder that a generation of religious priests, seminarians and sisters, at a time when marches with red banners were frequent, considered integrating Marxism into the social concerns articulated by no less than Jesus in the Gospels.

There were even priests in Latin America and in the Philippines who traded their stoles for long-barreled guns like Fr. Zacarias Agatep, Fr. Nilo Valerio, Fr. Conrado Balweg, to name prominent ones who died in the struggle, for the social vision that Marx had.

But isn't it true that land for farmers, decent jobs secured for everyone, and other social issues that may provoke the Marxist alternative in any conversation are also a concern for the Church?

St. Pope John Paul II, a man who personally experienced harsh living conditions in a state that was built on what Marx taught, objects to the analysis that humanity should be regarded to as mere subjects in the cycle of class struggle.

If Marx is to be followed, the only way to end the systemic cycle of class struggle is to eliminate social classes. Now, while it sounds ideal in having such a vision of social equality, the Polish Pope reckons that this movement demands violence and strips the person of his autonomy as a pawn of either force for, after all, the proletariat - who claims to be the liberating army of the oppressed - dreams of seizing state power through.in the words of Vladimir Lenin, a "dictatorship" which means oppression anew.

In his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II offered a clear alternative for Catholics in having a vision for social justice: Solidarity - a "call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers especially... when the machine tends to dominate man" and is also a "reaction against the degradation of man as the subject of work, and against the unheard-of accompanying exploitation" (LE 8).

It has the makings of the Marxist perspective, yet it speaks of a more humane or - borrowing the late Fr. John Carroll SJ's terms in his book *Engaging Society: The Sociologist in a War Zone* (AdMU Press, 2006) - a "moral socialism" but is both "non-Marxist" and "non-ideological" as it accordingly "proposes no overall theory of history and appeals to no historical necessity [and retains] man in his freedom [as] the author of his destiny."

MARX AS A PROPHET?

Past or present, people have been looking for prophets who would speak to and for them.

And why do people long for prophets? It is precisely because of their desire for salvation.

Karl Marx, depending on how people would see him, was, in many ways, a prophetic voice that rallied people through critical perspectives on how society functions.



It would be faulty to dismiss him as irrelevant because most of his critiques and insights - such as on the gap between the rich and the poor and the role that institutional religion had in widening this divide - keeps on catching the attention of people and seems to have articulated the narratives spoken of by the younger generation in recent times.

In *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI recognized that "Karl Marx took up the rallying call, and applied his incisive language and intellect to the task of launching this major new and, as he thought, definitive step in history towards salvation."

But it could be said that Marxist-oriented regimes have gone berserk and inhumane in its means of attaining this salvation. Benedict XVI, years before he became Pope, wrote in the book *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World: Assessment & Forecast* (Ignatius Press, 1994): "One can and must say simply that Marxism failed as an all-embracing interpretation of reality and as a directive for action in history. Its promise of freedom, equality and welfare for all was not verified by the empirical facts; it was shown to be false on the basis of political and economic facts."

The German Pope, in *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (Ignatius Press, 2005) added: "[Marx] forgot that man always remains man. He forgot man and he forgot man's freedom. He forgot that freedom always remains also freedom for evil. He thought that once the economy had been put right, everything would automatically be put right. His real error is materialism: man, in fact, is not merely the product of economic conditions, and it is not possible to redeem him purely from the outside by creating a favourable economic environment."

Sans the ideological label tagged on Marxism, its essentials invite humanity to consider the need for solidarity with the oppressed and to stand up against oppression which, in hindsight, is not contrary to values that Jesus Christ preached in the Gospel.

Pope Francis articulates this challenge: "It has been said many times and my response has always been that, if anything, it is the communists who think like Christians. Christ spoke of a society where the poor, the weak and the marginalized have the right to decide. Not demagogues, not Barabbas, but the people, the poor, whether they have faith in a transcendent God or not. It is they who must help to achieve equality and freedom".

Earl A. P. Valdez

BENEATH THE LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

What Marvel's *Daredevil* Teaches Us About Heroes and Heroism

Unsurprisingly, there is a saturation of superheroes on film and TV. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) already has almost twenty superhero films in the span of a decade, which made names like Captain America and Iron Man famous for both kids and adults. Meanwhile, Detective Comics does almost the same, as it brings Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, and the entire Justice League to the big screen.

Outside and beyond the intergalactic dramas portrayed in these movies, however, Marvel also brought to life the "local" heroes who protect their own respective territories. Released in the online streaming service Netflix, a series of Marvel superheroes collectively called "The Defenders" take care of matters that are more "ordinary." If movie superheroes deal with aliens and large-scale threats on Earth, these heroes are out to



New York lawyer Matt Murdock and his alter-ego as the Daredevil raises important questions on heroism, the human condition, and most importantly faith in God.

These movies bring to greater life what people read in comic books and graphic novels; but more than that, what happens in these movies is the attempt to define what makes a hero, given our contemporary context. Thus, we see how general beliefs and ideas about being a hero are formed and reformed, how values are upheld, and how lines are drawn between what is good and evil. On a large and cosmic level, these heroes are portrayed to have impressive powers and technological feats that change the common fate of humanity. *Avengers: Infinity War*, the latest movie in the Marvel franchise, showed how much these powers make us think of humanity and the human condition in a world where a supernatural being wields the power to wipe away a huge number of beings in the world, humans included.

keep the streets of New York City safe from criminals, gangs, and drug rings. Among them stands uniquely Matt Murdock, a blind lawyer who defends the poor and disenfranchised in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York. But at night, he prowls the alleys as a costumed superhero, the *Daredevil*, who uses his heightened senses and refined martial arts skills to defend citizens from those who seek to harm them. But more interestingly, this current adaptation of the popular comic book figure shows that in his fight against evil, his faith and values as a Catholic are continuously challenged. This prompts us as the audience to seek for a greater understanding of what it means to believe and to be good in our own lives as believers.

The "Devil of Hell's Kitchen"

Almost every episode of *Daredevil's* three seasons brings us to Matt Murdock's world and dilemmas. The primary antagonist of the series is Wilson Fisk, known as the Kingpin, an influential gang leader and drug lord who seeks control over Hell's Kitchen and eventually New York City as a whole. But Fisk himself is a complex figure, a product of violence and abuse within his own family. While one gets the impression that he is evil through and through, the plot reveals that there were decisions he made to protect Vanessa, a woman whom he loved and valued. The struggle between Murdock and Fisk takes place in the choices that they have to make against each other and for those whom they truly value.

But there are also equally complex characters that Murdock / The *Daredevil* encounters in the course of the plot. The question of justice and retribution is raised in the character of Frank Castle, a former marine who, after the death of his family at the hands of terrorists, swore to eliminate criminals who get in his way. The famous conversation between Murdock and Castle in a New York rooftop is a serious moral and philosophical debate on the value of human life of human life, especially of those who were identified as evil and unjust. In that scene, Castle defends that eliminating criminals who get away from the law would be the best thing to be done for those who have lost loved ones due to these criminals' activities. He also argues that this is the best way to prevent them from "going back to the streets" when the justice system favors them. Murdock, however, delivers a reply that defends the dignity of the human person, no matter what he/she has done:

> "A human being who did a lot of stupid s***, maybe even evil, but had one small piece of goodness in him. Maybe just a scrap, Frank, but something. And then you come along [and kill him/her], and that one tiny flicker of light gets snuffed out forever."



Murdock's character as a believer coming to terms with the problem of evil and understood from the lens of his Catholic faith enables audiences to also grapple with their own faith and belief in a morally complex world, in a rather explicit and straightforward manner. (source: GeekTyrant)

With the way they see and experience the world differently, audiences are left to ask the question themselves within their own worldviews and context.

Moreover, the addition of Benjamin Poindexter, an FBI agent with a bleak past, enables us to see how, despite having morally good intentions and principles, the human person can be greatly affected by his past and his traumas. Unfortunately, these weaknesses were used by Fisk to his advantage, and Poindexter ended up having to face the consequences of his actions.



Murdock also has friends and companions along the way, through whom his own character and principles are revealed and challenged. Mentors like Father Lampton and Sister Maggie Grace, who have become his moral anchors, also confronted their own dark sides and reminded him occasionally of his faith and commitment to goodness and justice. The same can be said of Frank "Foggy" Nelson, Murdock's best friend and fellow lawyer, and Karen Page, his love interest, who help Murdock both as lawyer and as vigilante along the way. Murdock's martial arts master Stick as well as former companion and lover, Elektra Natchios, aid him in making the crucial decision and acting upon them. All of them have shown how, in the course of Murdock's double life, friendship plays a significant role in going through the complex situations that Murdock has to face.

Being part of a larger universe, Daredevil once joined forces with other heroes such as Luke Cage, Jessica Jones, and the Iron Fist, forming "The Defenders" who saved New York from destruction
(source: thenational.ae)

Daredevil's three seasons showed that the struggle to be good against evil is more complicated than we think, given the very complex natures of humans who belong tothis backdrop. It shows that whenever this question is raised not on the level of concepts but on that of personal experiences, we see that our knowledge and beliefs of what it means to be human and, to a certain extent, to believe in a good God are brought to the fore and challenged. We see in Murdock a person who, from his childhood, believes in the fundamental goodness of people; however, the more he encounters evil as a vigilante, this belief that he bears is continuously challenged by the people he encounters and fights. This belief is then contrasted in the villains he encounters, who, carrying their issues and internal conflicts, have chosen to do evil not for its own sake, but for seemingly good things and values. In this regard, we can then ask: what does *Daredevil* teach us about being good in a world where choosing the evil seems to be an easy way out of our problems and conflicts?

Daredevil and the Christian Vocation

The story of *Daredevil* and his relationships with other characters in their uniqueness tells us that the question of good and evil cannot be answered with sweeping conclusions; rather, understanding and responding to it depends on one's context and experience. Moreover, it comes with much consideration of how human beings truly are: formed by their own pasts, struggling with their own woundedness and weaknesses, and hoping to overcome them with whatever means. In a unique manner, we also see through Murdock's character how this is done in the light of faith; in the struggle to do what is right, he also struggled with his own belief in a compassionate and just God.

But the thing is only in facing the difficulty of these struggles can one be able to respond to God's call to doing and being good. Murdock had to face his own dilemmas and demons, including the deep dark truths about himself and his relationships. He also had to come to terms with the fact that outside him are different value systems and means of understanding and confronting the world, most especially with those whom he was up against. The question for him, really, is how to understand, make sense of, and bring justice to people with good intentions and evil actions, when one knows that one cannot justify means with an end and that love and dedication can serve the best and worst of reasons. In a way, we as the audience confront these questions in our contexts, value systems, beliefs, and our faith. Each episode would always lead us to ask the important questions about our deepest selves, our own faith, and our own way of dealing with people around us in their complex, fallen yet graced, nature.

> This is not an easy thing to do, for it involves facing our own selves, especially the aspects that we largely ignore or take for granted

Fortunately, *Daredevil* equally offers the fact that being and doing good is still possible with much faith, trust, and hope. If there is one characteristic that stands out in Matt Murdock, it is the ability to see the goodness in people around him, no matter how they make decisions and face consequences. And in tough times, Murdock in one way or another entrusts himself to the people who continue to support him and see the goodness inside him, even though he himself could not do so. Surely, his mentors and friends were imperfect; nevertheless, they stood with him in his fight against evil and injustice, one way or another. They are those who are kind enough to accept him and brave enough to admonish him, helping him build and rebuild his own identity and faith in the crisis that he faces. In fact, one is left



Murdock's battle with the crime lord of Hell's Kitchen Wilson Fisk (right) reveals more of his character and values, knowing that he is continually challenged to remain firm and strong in his faith as he faces the evils that befall Hell's Kitchen.
(source: vanityfair.com)

with the impression that in the end, *Daredevil* is not about *Daredevil* alone, but a combined effort of all those who believe in the good in the midst of evil. This also leads us to ask: do we still believe in God and in others in this manner? The answer, apparently, comes from our own choices and commitment to God and to doing and being good.

Bringing these altogether, one sees a dark yet beautiful image of the fundamental reality of Christian life, most especially in times when we struggle with our faith within our everyday lives and personal battles. The questions and insights brought by *Daredevil* leads us to think and act on a world that is full of complexities, with people that are both radically and essentially similar and unique.

It involves facing our own selves, especially the aspects that we largely ignore or take for granted.

In a way, it leads us to examine our fundamental beliefs and principles, and from them make the right decisions in life. It reminds us of the need to discern, to weigh our options in the light of our faith and respond to what God calls us to do and to be. And finally, it reminds us that in the end, what counts is hope, that in doing our best to be and to do good, it is God who keeps things in their place and gives it new meanings.

From Darkness to Light: The Challenge of Christian Hope

One can thus see how *Daredevil* is a series that touches on the fundamental reality of being a believer; more than the fact that Matt Murdock has explicitly Catholic roots, it points out the challenge of Christian life as the commitment to bear the Gospel in a reality that may or may not heed to it. And as such, *Daredevil* challenges us to re-examine and recommit our lives as believers, essentially in a pursuit of holiness.

Pope Francis tells the Church that in responding to this call to holiness, we allow God to enter into our lives; eventually, we are called to see that no aspect of our life is off-limits (*Gaudate et Exsultate*, no. 175). The development of the many dimensions of Matt Murdock's life in *Daredevil* subtly shows how God's presence and his faith touched on the deepest (and even darkest) parts of his life. This includes not only his past but also his present and future. But then, this constant and gradual process of allowing God to penetrate his beliefs and decisions became a struggle that was fruitful for him, which enabled him to define who he is as a hero for many, both as a lawyer and a vigilante.

We are called by God in the same way, that in the midst of evil in this world, of our own personal struggles and conflicts, we choose the good and eventually allow Him to enter our lives. This is not an easy thing to do, for it involves facing our own selves, especially the aspects that we largely ignore or take for granted. But once we make choices in the light of our faith, we see that there is so much to live for, to do good for, and to hope for. After all, this is one thing that God Himself has struggled with and shown in and through Jesus Christ, who is not a mere hero among heroes, but the distinct and incomparable standard of heroism on whom every Christian places his/her belief, commitment, and hope.



LST ALUMNI HOMECOMING:

Homily of Fr. Mateo "Matt" Sanchez, SJ, (LST Golden Jubilarian)

Oratory of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Loyola House of Studies
November 14, 2018

As a Golden Jubilarian and one of the first fruits of LST, I have been asked by Fr. Joe Quilongquilong to share with you how LST helped and prepared me for my spiritual and pastoral ministries. Since early beginnings are always very formative in life, I suppose much of my life and work as a priest was influenced by my early years of formation here at LST.

So we just share with you some of the important events in my life, starting from our studies here at LST and on to the present.

We were the first Jesuits to study theology here in the Philippines. Before our time, Filipino Jesuits had their studies in theology in the US where they were also ordained. With the eight of us Jesuits in the newly established LST in 1965 were some three or four Oblates, the same number of Benedictines from San Beda, and two diocesan seminarians of San Jose. Incidentally one of our Oblate classmates was the late Bishop de Jesus who was killed by the Muslims in Jolo.

What was LST like at its beginning? We were then a very small academic community compared to the present. We were exclusively diocesan and religious

seminarians. No sisters, nor lay people. We had no computers, internet, and powerpoint presentations then. But we had an excellent library founded by the late Fr. Gehring. So we had to do a lot of reading. We also had many good professors, among whom were Fathers Healy, Wiley, Smith, Calderone, San Juan, Hontiveros, and Sevilla. They are all gone now. It was quite a relief for us to have our classes in English after three years of philosophy taught in Latin- lecture, text and oral exam in that language.

In our classes in systematic Theology, Morals, Sacred Scripture and Liturgy, matters which are all common place to you now were very new then, and very exciting to us. The decrees of Vatican II were first beginning to be promulgated after the long debates and deliberations of the council.

The first important decree, which greatly affected us, was on the liturgy. After years and years of Tridentine Masses in Latin, you could imagine how we felt to hear Mass in a language we understood!

Then there was the new ecumenical movement. After years of debating with Protestants, we were then encouraged to reach out in dialogue with our separated brethren, especially the Aglipayans and main-line Protestants. I remember we even had a dialogue with a group of *Iglesia ni Cristo* (INC) right here at Loyola (one of the INC ladies even asked me how long had I been training for the priesthood, when I told her it was my 12th year and I had a couple more years to go before I get ordained, she told me why don't I join their group and I could be a pastor within just a year!). I think I thanked her, but I was declining her offer *kasi saying naman* all those years I have spent in my preparation for the priesthood!

During that time we were also encouraged to out for social apostolate. We Jesuits were ordained after third year theology, so during our fourth year we spent our weekend saying Masses and helping out among the poor in the chapels of Barangka, Tañong and Nangka.



One sad effect of this renewal in the Church at the time, was the departure from the seminary, religious life and even the priesthood by many. Four of our Jesuit companions left during second year of our theology. We even lost our prominent canon law professor.

> Looking back on my life, I noticed that with the things I originally planned, nothing materialized. It was the things that I did not plan that brought me great success

After our graduation from LST, I went to UP Los Baños to finish my master's degree in agriculture. From Los Baños, I was sent Mindanao to teach at Xavier University (XU) College of Agriculture in Cagayan De Oro, and then to work with the XU extension service for farmers in Bukidnon. While teaching the farmers new advances in agricultural technology, like the use of inorganic fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides, many of which are banned today by ecologists, I was also happily exercising my new priestly ministry among the people of the neighboring Barangay of Campo Uno. Bukidnon then was a newly created prelature with Bishop Francisco Claver as its first bishop. All the priests of Bukidnon then were Jesuit missionaries, with only one diocesan priest. This was also during the early years of Martial Law, and the local Church of Bukidnon under Bishop Claver led the people in their critical opposition to the abuses of military and government officials. I was very much inspired by those Jesuit missionaries of Bukidnon, so that for a time I was considering spending my life as a missionary in Bukidnon.

But then my superiors recalled me to Manila to prepare become a novice master. I was sent to India to study spirituality under Fr. Anthony de Mello. While in India I had a chance to join a Buddhist Retreat called *Vipasana*, an exercise of awareness of breathing and of body sensations which I am still practicing till now.

I found my work as Novice Master very difficult at the beginning. Luckily I was later assisted by two very good formators in Fr. Vic Salanga and Fr. Benny Calpotura. We were thus able to design and implement a new method of formation we called "Open Novitiate" which the Jesuits are still practicing till the present. Products of this formation program are no less than Fr. Joe Quilongquilong himself, along with Frs. Provincial Viray and Moreno, Frs. Rector Borres and Repole, and Fr. Jett Villarin, Ateneo President.

After 13 years as novice master I was transferred to St John Vianney Theological Seminary in Cagayan de Oro where I was assigned as spiritual director, confessor and SPFY director for seven years. Incidentally, three of our seminarians at that time have been recently ordained bishops in Mindanao.

Just when I thought I would be doing formation work for the rest of my life, I was suddenly asked by our Provincial if I was still interested in doing mission work in Bukidnon. Of course, I readily grabbed the opportunity. So for 17 years, I worked as a missionary among the Indigenous Peoples (IP) of Bukidnon. That was one of my most

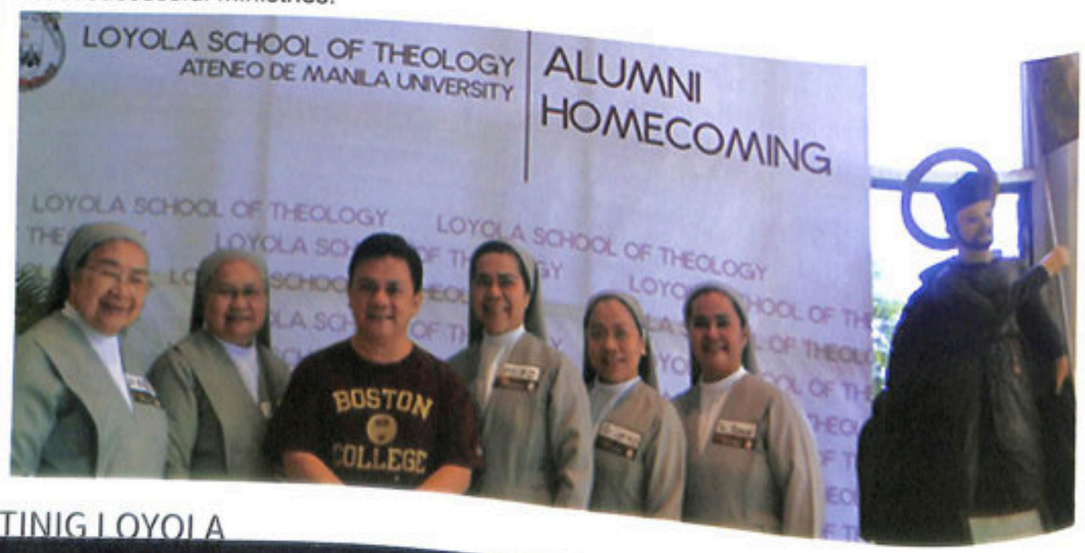
physically difficult ministries, but also my most successful and happiest mission.

Four years ago I was reassigned back in Vianney Seminary in Cagayan. This year my original batch of four Jesuits who were first ordained here at LST in 1968 are celebrating our Golden Jubilee. But two of our companions, Frs. Montecastro and Unson, are dead, and the third, Fr. Cuerquis, is now retired at our Wellness Center, leaving me alone and still up and about at 85 years.

Looking back on my life, I noticed that with the things I originally planned nothing much materialized. It was the things that I did not plan that brought me great success. For instance I never planned to be a priest, much less a Jesuit, as I originally intended to pursue a career either in Medicine or Science in UP; but I got a vocation to the Jesuits. For my specialization as a Jesuit, I first took up a master's degree in agriculture to teach at XU College of Agriculture; but I became a novice master instead. And just when I thought I'd spend the rest of my life in formation work, I got a mission assignment to Bukidnon IP. All these were unplanned but they were my most successful ministries.

So how did LST help and prepare me for these spiritual and pastoral ministries? I think the spirit of *aggiornamento* or renewal in the Church during our theological studies around the early years up Vatican II made me open and very enthusiastic about the mission, and to the new changes in all aspects of my life and work as a priest. My love for the new liturgy has remained all these years. Even now at my age, I don't get tired saying Mass, hearing confessions, giving retreats and spiritual direction. Our exposure to the poor in our social apostolate here also helped me very much in my work for squatters of Sapang Palay, the farmers, and the IPs of Bukidnon. The study habit and discipline at LST helped my persistence and endurance on my various apostolates. I also like a simple lifestyle, independent of all the modern communication gadgets, which we did not have during our time at LST.

Of course, behind all this was also my Jesuit spirituality. And most of all, the grace of God; God has been most kind and gracious to me. May His name be blessed!



LST Holy Spirit Mass (August 23, 2018)



The LST Community celebrated its annual Holy Spirit mass at the LHS oratory on August 23, 2018. Rev. Fr. Primitivo Viray, provincial of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus, was the main presider and homilist. The gathering was concelebrated by some faculty members who also professed their faith and swore an oath of fidelity to teach in harmony to the church teachings. The student council executive board for SY 2018-2019 were also inducted in office by the LST President, Rev. Fr. Jose Quilongquilong, SJ. After the Mass, a simple lunch and welcome party for the community was held.

From Father to Fr. Family Man to Priest.



The first theological hour for this school year was held on September 12, 2018. Fr. Lamberto Ramos of the Diocese of Antipolo was invited to share his journey from being a family man and corporate executive, to becoming a priest, as was his late wife's wish. Fr. Ramos also shared his wisdom and insight from his long years of work in various industries, relating them to the enterprise of evangelization and mission. Fr. Ramos, an alumnus of Loyola School of Theology, drew headlines when he was ordained on June 2, 2018.

Season of Creation (September 26, 2018)



An interfaith prayer service in connection with the Celebration of Season of Creation was held on September 26, 2018 at the Laudato Si' Terrain. The prayer service was led by Fr. Joe Quilongquilong. Present was the LST community, with students of various nationalities and cultures offering their own ways of worship and prayer. Representatives from different faiths also attended and participated, strengthening the commitment of all to care for our common home.

Walking Our Walk: A Forum on the Synod on the Youth



On October 24, 2018 a forum was held about the XV Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. Heading the forum were four representatives from the Philippines who participated in the March pre-synodal meeting of young people in Rome, which aimed to come up with a document that reflected the voice of the youth. Mr. Earl Allyson P. Valdez, a fourth-year seminarian of the San Jose Seminary and the Archdiocese of Manila, Sr. Cynthia Calabig, FMA, of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco, and Ms. Alyanna Therese C. Pangilinan and Mr. Gerald Rey O. Coquia, youth ministers of the Diocese of Bacolod, and the Archdiocese of Palo, respectively, shared their experiences and personal insights about this momentous meeting, which involved participants from all over the world.

LST Alumni Homecoming (November 14, 2018)



On November 14, 2018 the LST community celebrated its annual Alumni Homecoming. The event started with testimonies from the clergy and consecrated life, given by Fr. Jovic Lobrigo of the Diocese of Legaspi and Sr. Malen Java, RC. The celebration of the Eucharist followed, with the Golden Jubilarian Father Mateo Sanchez, SJ, as the presider and homilist. A dinner program that featured a festival of Asian Art and Culture, with performances by students of diverse nationalities and cultures. The Golden Jubilarians, from the class of 1968, and the Silver Jubilarians, from the batch 1993, were honored during the program.

Superior General Meets the Jesuits in LST (December 8, 2018)



The Grand Chancellor of the Loyola School of Theology and Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Rev. Fr. Arturo Sosa SJ, arrived in the Philippines on December 7, 2018. Among his many stopovers was LST, which he visited the following day, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. He met over 200 Jesuits of the Philippine Province in the Sin Center, and talked about the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society, the Society's response to the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, and the challenges facing the Society. After the conference, Father General presided at Mass in the Oratory of St. Ignatius, underscoring in his homily the freedom and importance of the "yes" of Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, and the "yes" of the Jesuits in their mission and in their universal apostolic preferences. A simple dinner followed the celebration, sponsored by the Loyola House of Studies.

Love Stronger than Death: A Theological Response to Suicide in Depression



On February 19, 2019, a theological hour on mental health and spirituality was held. Sr. Maria Cecilia C. Tuble of the Religious of the Cenacle presented not only the scientific explanation about depression, mental health, and suicide, as well as the Church's response to this phenomenon, but also her own journey of depression and recovery. She emphasized the need for pastoral workers to understand the workings of depression and encourage medical intervention instead of simple moralizing or spiritualizing. She also highlighted the assistance of her spirituality and her community in eventually overcoming depression.

Sports Fest 2019 (February 25, 2019)



This year's LST Sports Fest was held on February 25 with the theme "Formed by Love, Formed to Love" at the Ateneo College Covered Courts. Activities like warm-up exercises, Zumba, basketball, volleyball, and other sports were organized by the Student Council, and participated in by students of all year levels. After a hard-fought battle, the first year class was declared the overall champions.

Father Eric Eusebio is New LST President



In a letter addressed to the LST community and dated March 22, 2019, the Jesuit Provincial, Fr. Primitivo Viray, Jr., SJ, announced the Congregation for Catholic Education's confirmation of the appointment of Fr. Enrico "Eric" Eusebio, SJ, as the new President of LST. Fr. Eric, the current Vice President for Administration and professor of Canon Law, will start his term on May 16, 2019, ensuring the continuation of LST's "vital ministry... for the Society and the Church", in the words of Fr. Viray. Fr. Provincial also expressed his gratitude, and that of Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, Prefect of the Congregation, for the excellent leadership of Fr. Jose Quilongquilong, SJ, who had served as LST president for six years.



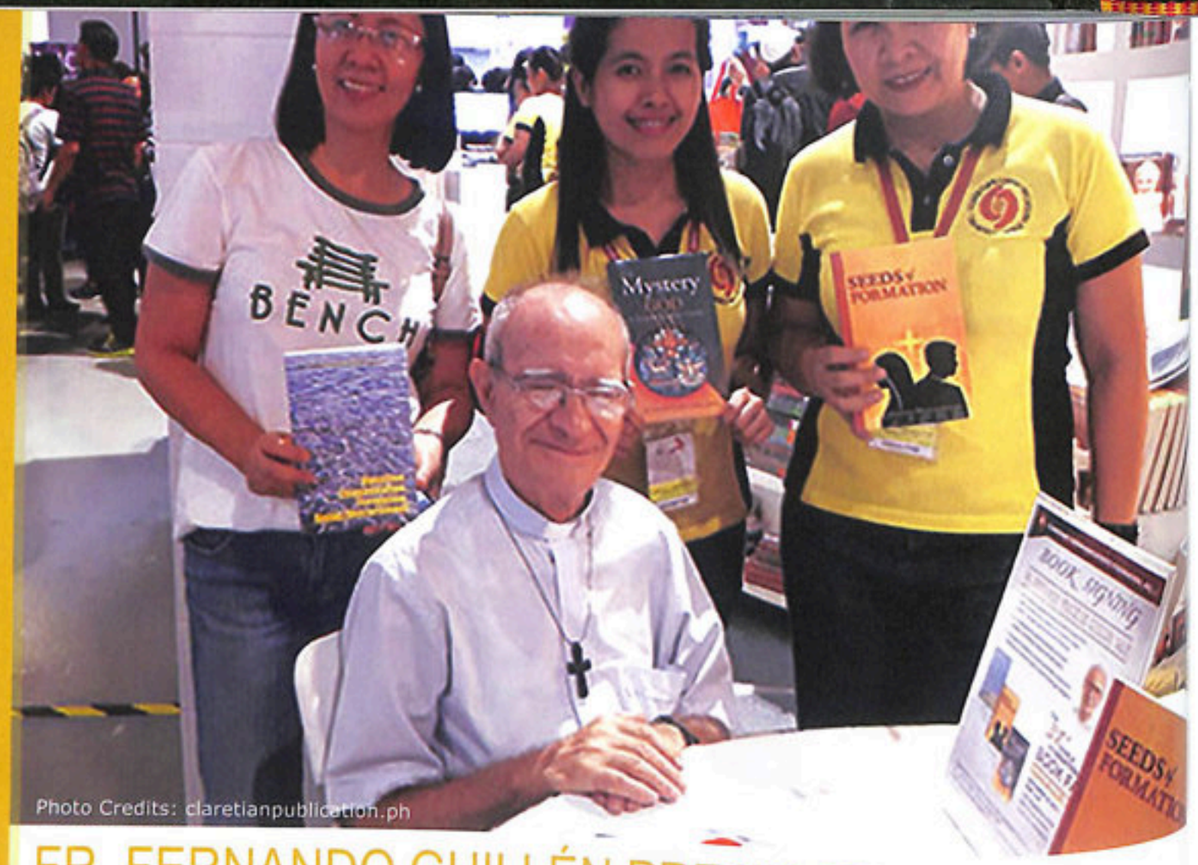


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FR. FERNANDO GUILLÉN PRECKLER, Sch. P.: The Theologian of Simplicity

Note: This tribute to the late Father Guillén, a former professor of Church History and Systematic Theology at LST, was originally written in French by Vincent-Sosthene Fouda of the University of Houston on May 10, 2018.

I learned a few hours ago about the death of Professor Fernando Guillén Preckler, a Piarist religious. He was a mentor for many of us. While emotion takes hold among us, I would like to gather some memories not only of the priest, or the man, or the theologian, or the philosopher, but simply of the intellectual that I have known. Whenever I read "Fr. Fernando's works", as we called them at the scholasticate in Dakar in Senegal, I realize more and more clearly the work he has done in simplicity to unite man with thought; better, to unite thought with action, to give birth to what I later called, ten years since our first encounter, "the co-generation of thought and action".

Fernando Guillén Preckler, before being a great theologian and a master of the Faith, was, first of all, a historian of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, the founder of the Oratorians, who himself was the contemporary of St. Joseph de Calasanz, the founder of the Pious Schools. From Cardinal de Bérulle to whom he dedicated in 1972 a thesis at the Gregorian University of Rome, entitled "*Etat Chez Le Cardinal de Bérulle Théologie Et Spiritualité Des États Bérulliens*" (State in the Theology of Cardinal de Bérulle and the Spirituality of the Bérullian States), and through St. Joseph Calasanz, the founder of his Congregation, we discover a man of great simplicity, who really believed, prayed, personified holiness, and built peace not with stones but with clay. Fr. Guillen was indeed a man of ideas and a man of God.

Fr. Fernando Guillén was an intellectual accustomed to working in silence surrounded by modesty, allergic to the fires of the news.

> Fr. Guillen had solid training that gave him a high level of study, attention to new methods, and familiarity with ancient and contemporary authors

This "theologian of simplicity", was born in Barcelona in 1941, made solid studies of philosophy and theology in Barcelona, at the autonomous University of Barcelona, and then, at the Jesuit Gregorian University of Rome during the Second Vatican Council. Fr. Guillen remained deeply attached to the region of Barcelona, whose beauties he praised. He grew up in an environment that had the innate sense of job well done, in a family that treasured the values underpinning the strength of a society.

I had him as my Introduction to Philosophy professor and as a teacher of what is called The School of French Spirituality, with the influence of the Jesuits, Sulpicians, Eudists and St. Francis de Sales. Fr. Guillén, by his small size, was almost unnoticed. But he could not be called an anonymous theologian because of his powerful ideas and influence in the intellectual circles in Mexico, Senegal, Cameroon and the Philippines, his last land of welcome, at the Loyola School of Theology where he taught Systematic Theology and Church History. In Senegal, I had him as a spiritual director in the 90's while he was also teaching Lieberman of Sébikotan and the philosopher Saint Augustine at the Major Inter-Diocesan Seminary. Late in the night, he would bring together the philosophers of Dakar to think about the contribution of Africa to the development of the social doctrine of the church from Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*.

As part of the major survey conducted by the International Institute and The University of Fribourg, on " Ethics, Economy and Development: The Contribution of Christian Communities", we then worked for "a Christian presence in the philosophical news in Africa and in ethical thought, in relation to development." All this was in connection to Jacques Maritain (the famous French Thomist - ed.).

As a teacher, Guillén never had the air of being a doctor of theology, and in his relations with his colleagues and students, he never departed from niceness without pretense and simplicity without facade. He easily blended into a team and agreed to collaborate without practicing "*dirigisme*" (state control of economic and social matters) and pronouncing exclusivity. His availability led him to take an obscure assignment such as the management of the magazine and to use ingenuity to best fulfill functions by which he did not feel disho- nored. Colleagues found him to be a good adviser and the students appreciated his kindness as he always willingly encouraged and followed closely those who worked un- der his direction. All who approached him experienced a sense of welcome and bene- volence. These qualities of the heart are a credit to the man.

Fr. Guillen had solid training that gave him a high level of study, attention to new methods.

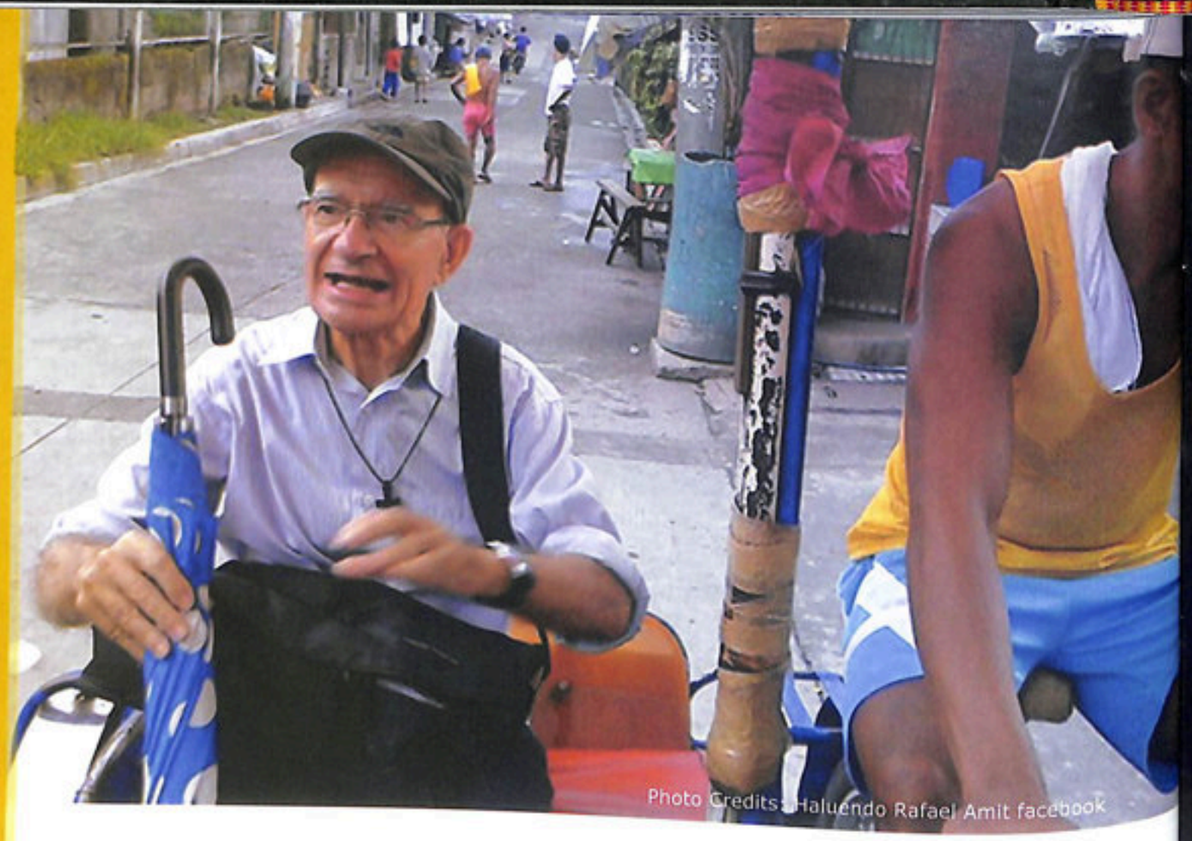


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and familiarity with ancient and contemporary authors. He was always on alert and mentally curious which led him to follow closely the movement of exegetical, liturgical and patris- tic renewal. At the same time, he was open to the contributions of the human sciences and was keenly interested in philosophy, linguistics and hermeneutics. All this enabled him to present relevant syntheses, exciting developments, and analysis of particular texts. With mastery, he deconstructed a text, to show the logical articulation, the specificity of a process, and the interweaving of themes and schemes. As a teacher-researcher myself today, I can only better appreciate in hindsight the work done by Guillén in Black Africa. He left us a classic work in literature: *Rereading African Classics*. In this work, he became African not with Africans but with Africa.

What effects could he obtain thanks to the placing in perspective of patristic, medieval and modern texts? The Liturgy found its place in Theology as Fr. Fernando Guillén excelled in mutual enrichment of theological reflection and spiritual experience, where the mystery of Christ unfolds in all its dimensions. This teacher had the qualities of the good pedagogue who, while putting himself within the reach of his audience, has the constant concern to raise the level of the student.

Fr. Fernando Guillén was often cramped within the limits of traditional class time. On this subject, I remember that as much as he was picky about the time of Mass in his preaching, so too was it always necessary that someone had to intervene to snatch away Fr. Guillén from the listeners who harassed him with questions afterwards. Happy to sow abundantly, Fr. Guillén was

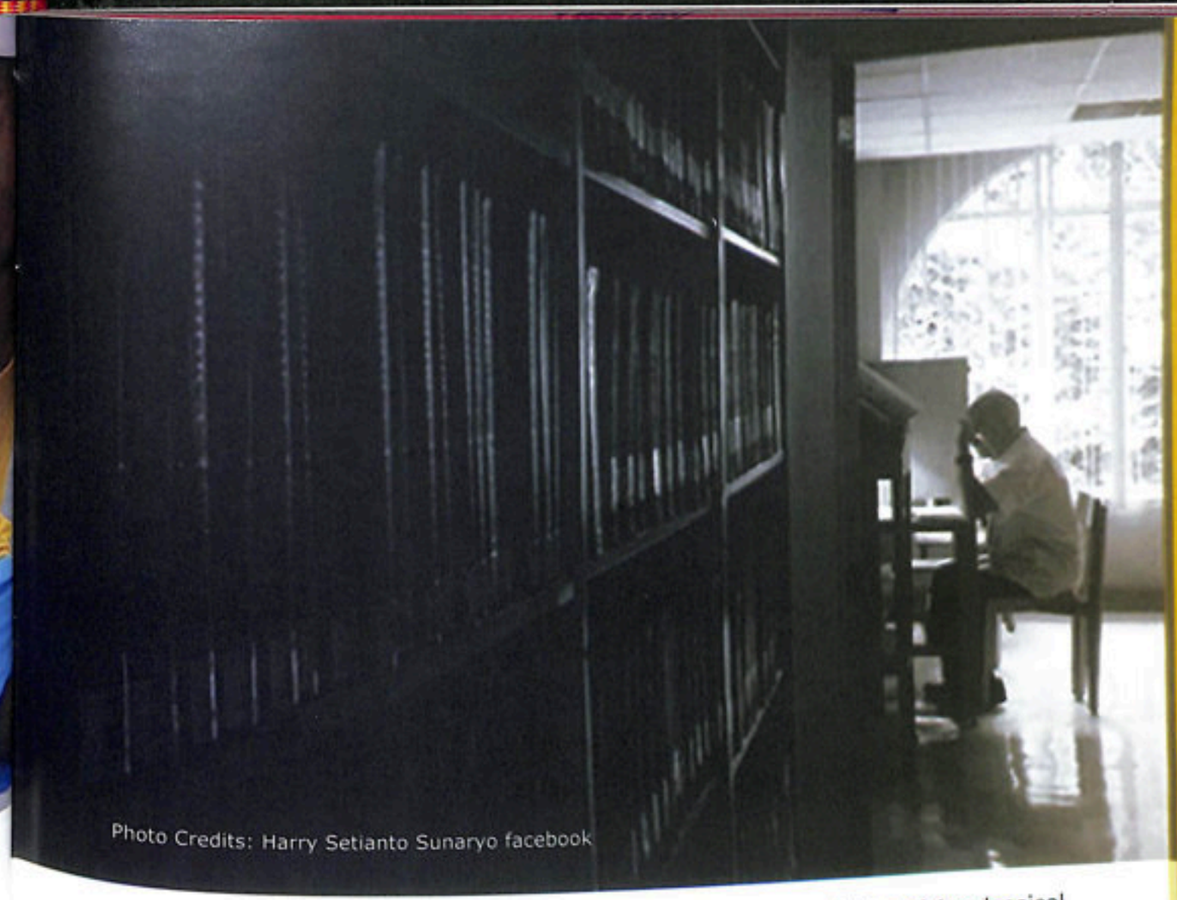


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even happier to bring to maturity among the students the plants he had helped to grow by patient and judicious interventions, worthy of an expert gardener. If this teaching was so fruitful, it was because it was nourished by research.

Fr. Guillén was naturally inclined to go to the sources. The consultation of documents and the work on the original texts were for him the normal procedure. The reading of the manuscripts, as exacting as it was, fascinated him and his wisdom enabled him to propose intelligent conjectures. Being meticulous and boundlessly patient enabled him to verify hypotheses and to give explanations which aroused admiration. His familiarity with the texts was such that he invited listeners to move around ancient Rome as if they were the contemporaries of Pope Leo the Great, and were participants in the liturgical stations. His knowledge of the classical languages made it easier for him to explore the semantic field of keywords, and he had as distractions the pleasures that come from a vigor of a thought, the accuracy of a formula, and the harmony of a well-paced phrase. Through his publications, Fr. Guillén ranks among the scholars who know best the texts and documents which concern systematic theology, the French school of spirituality, and the Patristic era.

This is our tribute of gratitude to Fr. Fernando Guillén Preckler, a Piarist religous, authority on Pierre de Bérulle, son of St. Joseph Calasanz, who by his teaching, his pedagogical qualities, and his research, has contributed powerfully to the birth of a new elite in Africa and in the Church that he has loved and served in an exemplary way.



LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

School Year 2018 - 2019

Master of Arts in Theological Studies, Pastoral Ministry, Spirituality and Retreat-Direction, and Family Ministry and Counseling	139
Bacalaureate in Sacred Theology (STB)	210
Doctor of Ministry (DMin)	13
Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL)	35
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology (PhD)	16
Doctorate in Sacred Theology (STD)	12

TOTAL NO. OF STUDENTS 479

24 Priests 5 Seminarians 44 Josefinos	DIOCESAN
34 Consecrated Women, 27 Priests, 1 Deacon, 219 Seminarians, and 247 Consecrated Men	CONSECRATED
59 Women 66 Men	LAY STUDENTS
8 Consecrated Women and Men 37 Priests 15 Lay	PROFESSORS









38 COUNTRIES

FOREIGN STUDENTS:

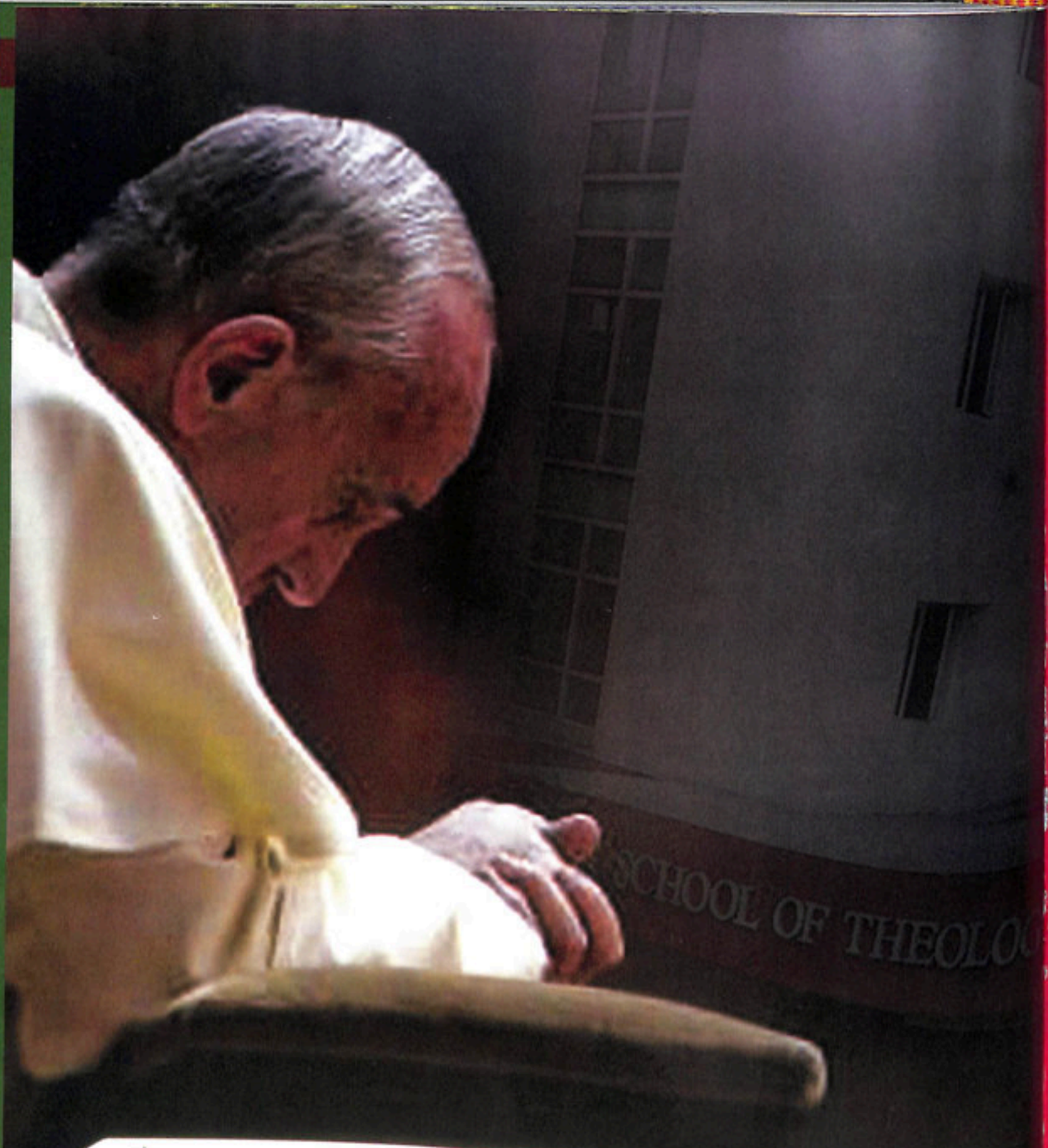
190 International Students

Angola, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Congo, East Timor, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Kiribati, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Mosotho (Lesotho), Myanmar, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka,

LOCAL STUDENTS:

289 Filipino Students





TINIG LOYOLA

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1144 Quezon City, Philippines. Email: admin@lst.edu