

# **Religion, Modernity and Life**

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# Foreword

*Pastor Milanie C. Arandela*

There are four types of contribution in this journal: Short essay, summary of dissertations done in graduate and post-graduate studies, lectures, and special papers with reflections and recommendations.

This second Journal of Theology offers a variety of perspectives and challenges related to traditional and non-traditional practices, examined and unexamined theology, beliefs, ideas, including those that are beyond human perception. It describes the past and the present thinking and practices, and seeks to find the ideal. This makes this Journal both descriptive and prescriptive in nature, with hopes to lead the reader to develop a kind of Christian perspective that is life transforming, life promoting, community building, and the like, allowing dynamic expressions of God in our context and being. Along this line, a paradigm shift in concepts, principles, perspectives, and practices, seems to be a suggestion.

## From

## To

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Four walls -----                     | Open spaces                              |
| Exclusivist -----                    | Inclusive and beyond                     |
| Spiritual ministry -----             | Social Ministry                          |
| Limited scope<br>and perspectives -- | Wider Perspectives                       |
| Giving -----                         | Sharing                                  |
| Independence-----                    | Interdependence (togetherness)           |
| Individualism -----                  | Communalism                              |
| Losing -----                         | Finding                                  |
| Death -----                          | Life and death, and life again           |
| Myths -----                          | Real life stories (encounters)           |
| Non-questioning -----                | Questioning (in this way we<br>Discover) |
| Traditional -----                    | Non-traditional                          |

Enhance this list as you find more paradigms in this journal. Our Christian duty is to discover what it really means to believe in the risen Christ and practice Christianity and our vocation in this time and space.

# Preface

*Dr. Limuel R. Equiña*

In this highly “secularized culture” which is frequently described as the culture of modernity, any meaningful theological endeavor cannot lose its focus in dealing with questions against the logic of the Christian faith. Otherwise, the Christian church will be marginalized from the mainstream of modern issues, hence dysfunctional in fulfilling its ministry of transformation.

For the interest of knowledge, this journal situates theology into the modern context and questions raised by the given context. It introduces the readers to the essential questions that range from local to global, from existential to eschatological matters. Overall, the subjects discussed in this volume include thoughts on ethics, indigenous religion and spirituality and theological views of life and death or clinical/pastoral aspects of dealing with the anxieties that so often besiege the bereaved. Each article reflects the personal opinion of the writer and thus it is in every respect subjective. Nevertheless the topics were chosen because of their importance to the wider community.

This second volume is a product of the collaborative endeavor between the Institute for Advanced Theological Studies and the College of Theology of Central Philippine University. This work reflects the commitment of the above institutions to respond to two challenges of theological education, namely, to publish research works of Filipino writers and to address the current issues that require Christian perspectives.

With this volume, we hope that the readers will have a feel of some issues discussed in classrooms and theological circles.





# FROM MULTILATERALISM TO ETHICS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF A PRACTICE

*Dr. Lester Edwin J. Ruiz*

*“... what might our ‘ethical considerations’ be when we think, talk and act about sovereignty, multilateral cooperation, international law, diplomacy in an era of violent globalization...?”*  
Liberato Bautista, June 23, 2003.

The “ethical demand,” if not religio-moral imperative, that intrudes from the theory and practice of “multilateralism,” has never been as important as it is today.

Multilateralism itself, understood especially as a creature of modernity and the *modern* system of states arising from the so-called “Peace of Westphalia” in 1648, and its various mutations and permutations in the past three hundred and fifty five years, is not new. The history of the West, if not world history itself, is testimony to a number of political, economic, and cultural experiments to establish “multi-sided,” pluralist *relationships* at various levels of local, national, regional, international, transnational, and, global life. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the West had its League of Nations; and in the post World War II era, the United Nations itself—perhaps, the most successful multilateral experiment of our time.

At the same time, these state-oriented experiments do not exhaust the idea of multilateralism, broadly

defined. From the “Communist International” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1960s, indeed, even Davos and the IMF/WB in the 1990s, and, the myriad political and social formations in “global civil society” exemplified, for example, by Porto Alegre and the World Social Forum, multilateralism, both as a normative aspiration and a pragmatic practice, has cast its long shadow on human life.

To be sure, multilateralism is a contested notion not only because of the complexity of its practices, or its political and ideological uses and misuses, but also because of the enormous appetite that it has for human and non-human capital. The demands of a genuinely *global* multilateral practice require all kinds of resources, which the world, particularly the states and peoples of the global North, may not yet be prepared to offer (or to surrender). In fact, if the past twenty years is to be our star witness, then, we might conclude that despite the clarity of the human aspiration for a multilateral practice, evidenced in the ground swells of global civil society: peace/antiwar movements, human rights movements, ecological movements, labor movements, the “best” that the post-, post-Cold War victors can and have offered, has been a post-9/11, unilateralist leadership, sanitized by a multilateralist sophistry that, when challenged, gives way to what some public intellectuals have called an unapologetic, not to mention unrepentant, “global fascism.”

Indeed, the so-called “global war” on terrorism, whether in Afghanistan or southern Philippines, the US-led war on Iraq, justified by the threat of Saddam Hussein’s capacity and use of weapons of mass destruction, and, even now, the “new” Africa and Middle East initiatives, all suggest a fundamental retreat of the US leadership into a unilateralist policy, if not philosophy, both in the domestic and international arenas. Multilateralism surrenders to unilateralism, particularly where US “interests” are at stake. Democracy, which, in

principle cannot avoid being a multilateralist practice, is expressed at its worst as “seeking consensus” *but only on US terms*, and is practiced at its best, in bilateral relations. At the level of meaning and the production and reproduction of meaning, the failure of such a unilateralist philosophy lies not only in its use or misuse of power, but also, perhaps, more importantly, in its gross misunderstanding of the realities of the *polis*. Either the present leadership is blind or it is deluded. Still, when practiced without a substantive commitment to the fundamentally “multi-sided” and pluralist realities of international and global life, bilateral relations are nothing more than a truncated, and therefore, inadequate, framework or perspective for human life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In fact, the argument for multilateralism, as a strategy and as a way of life, is a very straightforward one. It goes simply, but exquisitely, to the fundamental question about the nature and character of life, at least in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Science, religion, and faith today lead us down the pathway of pluralism, complexity, and contingency. Each proclaims that life is always and already more than what one can define through reason. One does not need to understand these claims normatively; practice itself demonstrates *without a doubt* that in politics, economics, and culture, indeed, at the level of ecology, *plenitude* is the defining character of *experienced* reality. The refusal to articulate one’s present and future within this context and framework leads to a fundamental denial of human life. To deny life is to enter premature death.

To assert that multilateralism is a practice, is to suggest that, by definition, multilateralism is *more* than a relationship among sovereign (and therefore, formally equal) states. No doubt, this has been the meaning ascribed to multilateralism in international relations. Still, to understand multilateralism as a creature of human life and not simply of the system of states, is to immediately

place it in the realm of “ethics,” that is, not only “what we ought to do,” but also, “the pursuit of the ‘good, the true, and the beautiful’”—thus, the “ethics of multilateralism” called for at the beginning of this essay.

Of course, the multilateralism of the system of states will not easily wither away. In fact, the US and Britain have in the post-9/11 era opened up a “Pandora’s Box” that, ironically, gave a lease, once again, to multilateralism understood as a contest among sovereign states, of multilateralism as mere discursive strategy to legitimize unilateralist ideology. Such strategy is neither principled nor democratic—if by democracy we mean the “power of the people” to create and re-create themselves. Any kind of ethics of multilateralism, therefore, must seek to make a distinction between the multilateralism of the system of states and a multilateralism that is principled (it submits to a reality beyond its own interest) and democratic/populist (it locates itself within the life of particular communities).

### **The futures of (Principled and Democratic/Populist) Multilateralism: Identity, Reflection, Discourse**

When understood in this way, (principled and democratic/populist) multilateralism as a *practice* raises a number of issues to which an “ethics of multilateralism” must attend: i) the character and location of the political, i.e., the nature of the social totality, ii) whose “multilateralism” is being assumed and under what conditions, i.e., the question of the subject and of subjectivity, and, iii) the languages (or discourses) of multilateralism itself.

The first area of practice asserts that multilateralism is tied to the location of the “political”; and, that precisely because this is so, it is today no longer possible to simply assume that the state (or the system of states) is the primary if not the exclusive, locus of politics, and, therefore, that the “political”—which has always been

more than government or the state—needs to be re-thought in order that the question of multilateralism, and any ethics arising from it, can be re-thought as well. The restructuring of labor on a global scale, does, in fact, raise the question not only of the nature of the social totality, but, of the character and location of the “political.” As well, the discourses around, for example, the revitalization of civil societies, of ecological and environmental politics, as well as matters of gender, race, and class—are significant also for this reason.

The second area of practice contends that it is today no longer possible to simply assume that multilateralism, indeed, even unilateralism, is mainly either about the identities of particular individuals or specific states, but, rather, about the demands for recognition by those who have been historically mis-recognized, indeed, excluded; and that, any notion of political identity or formation must include these demands as part of its self-understanding. This is the significance of discourses that raise the question of the marginalization and proletarianization of peoples of color, the pauperization and feminization of poverty, the sexual division of labor, not to mention sexual slavery, the commodification of sex, domestic violence, and enforced prostitution and trafficking of women and children, for the understanding and definition of multilateralism. These peoples are the ones excluded, or mis-recognized, and made to pay for the costly obsessions and rituals of repetition of capitalist-led globalization, best exemplified, perhaps, in the “iron-fisted” US-led global war on terrorism and in the ““velvet glove” of this latest incursion into Africa.

The third area of practice insists that it is no longer possible to make facile assertions, as modern epistemologies and ontologies do, about the separation, say of knowledge and power, reason and desire, fact and value, language and institutions; that, in fact, what appears to be abstract, in reality, are articulations of actual relations of ruling—beyond the fact that they may

also be *mere* ideological legitimations of certain ruling elites. Thus, there is a need to attend today to the very language, that is, the discursive formations and strategies, of multilateralism itself—as part of the task of re-thinking the identity of states, nations, and peoples. The point, of course, is not only that language is not innocent, nor that who speaks, and whose language is spoken, shapes the political agenda; but also, that language, as many have amply demonstrated, is productive—it produces an effect.

Where the multilateralism of the system of states is concerned, at least four areas for further reflection may be raised (following Anthony Smith's 1998 observations about nationalism):

1. The impact of current population movements (particularly of the so-called "migrant labor") on the prospects of the national state, and especially the fragmentation of national identity and the rise of multiculturalism;
2. The impact of feminist analysis and issues of gender on the nature of national projects, identities and communities, and the role of gendered symbolism and women's collective self-assertion;
3. The predominantly normative and political debate on the consequences for citizenship and liberty of civic, ethnic types of nationalism, and their relations with liberal democracy; and
4. The impact of globalization trends and of 'postmodern' supranational projects, on national sovereignty and national identity.

However, the future of (principled and populist) multilateralism as a discursive formation and strategy may require at least, three tasks. First, multilateralist discourses need to continue to recognize, affirm, and articulate different ways of producing and reproducing knowledge (epistemology): here, not only is this about

situated knowledges and partial perspectives, but also of subjugated and insurrectionary knowledges and agents of knowledges—and the ways in which they are related. Even more important, however, is the need to consistently focus, among other things, on the fundamental situatedness and partial character of our ways of organizing thinking, feeling and acting; and, on the necessity, if not desirability, of rethinking “the relationship between knowledge and emotion and construct [ion of] conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relationship between reason and emotion.” On face value, this may be a straightforward, even simplistic, if not obvious, statement about the nature of knowledge. However, when one understands that these claims are set in the context of the historical pretensions about the universality of (masculinist) reason as opposed to say, feminist desire, and of the reality that emotion is associated with subordinate groups—particularly women—and deployed to discount and silence those realities deemed to be irrational, then one begins to realize how these epistemologies actually explode patriarchal myths about knowledge on which much of political thinking, including multilateralist thought.

Second, multilateralist discourses need to continue to recognize, affirm, and articulate different modes of being (ontology): here, not only is this about thinking, feeling, and acting—as relational practices, but also about “volatile bodies,” i.e., of re-figuring and re-inscribing bodies, of moving through and beyond the conventional divide of gender as socially-constructed, on the one hand, and of sex as biologically-given, on the other hand, to “our bodies our selves.” Feminists have suggested that the “male (or female) body can no longer be regarded as a fixed, concrete substance, a pre-cultural given. It has a determinate form only by being socially inscribed... As a socio-historical ‘object’,” they continue, “the body can no longer be confined to biological determinants, to an

immanent 'factitious', or unchanging social status. It is a political object par excellence; its forms, capacities, behaviours, gestures, movements, potential are primary objects of political contestation. As a political object, the body is not inert or fixed. It is pliable and plastic material, which is capable of being formed and organized." Some public intellectuals, who argue that the body is an "inscribed surface of events", share this profound insight. Thus, the body becomes "malleable and alterable," its surface inscribed with gender, appropriate behaviour, standards of, for example, femininity. The significance of such an understanding cannot be underestimated. For, this means, not only that multilateralism, for example, is about "imagined communities" or "community sentiments of solidarity," but that its "what, when, where, and how" are inscribed—written on, embodied—in our very bodies.

Third, multilateralist discourses need to continue to recognize, affirm, and articulate different *empowering* practices (politics): here, not only is this about the importance and power of self-definition, self-valuation, nor of self-reliance and autonomy, but also about transformation and transgression, of finding safe places and voices in the midst of difference, and of making the connections. Chandra Mohanty summarizes this point quite well. She notes,

...third world women's writings on feminism have consistently focused on (1) the idea of the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism; (2) the crucial role of a hegemonic state in circumscribing their/our daily lives and survival struggles; (3) the significance of memory and writing in the creation of oppositional agency; and (4) the differences, conflicts, and contradictions internal to third world women's organizations and communities. In addition, they



have insisted on the complex interrelationships between feminist, antiracist, and nationalist struggles... (p. 10).

### **Concluding postscript: open space, moving time**

One cannot write today about the ethics of multilateralism without referring explicitly to the antecedents of what is referred to above as an “unapologetic, not to mention, unrepentant global fascism.” The obvious, yet, difficult, assertion is that the post 9/11 era has revealed the unilateralist logic of the leadership of the global North, the “internal” dynamics of which we are now seeing unfold before our own almost disbelieving eyes. What was true immediately after the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon remains true today. Thus, let me conclude this essay by way of repetition, if not somewhat “sermonic.”

Almost two years later, and a thousand and one justifications for Homeland Security, a continuing Christian Crusade against global terrorism, and, a war to vindicate the US at any cost (including the truth and innocent lives “at home and abroad”), there is no doubt that we are still moving through a profound crisis. America’s response, particularly its Government, is doing, at least, two things: first, it is locking down the space for thinking, feeling, and acting; and, second, it is stopping, freezing, and overwhelming time. Once space, time, and place (and now, we are becoming painfully aware, truth as well) are colonized—incarcerated, if not executed, as we saw in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, or the institutionalization of Homeland Security in the US legitimized under R.A. 3162, “The USA Patriot Act of 2001” and its subsequent supporting laws, and now, the blatant and unrepentant attempts to justify the calculated misleading of the US public in order to eliminate Saddam Hussein—once this happens—the moral/ethical and political life comes to an end. For ethics and politics require

open space, and moving time, i.e., history—human beings actively engaged in the creation and recreation of their everyday lives.

This is why, I believe, it is important for us to press beyond the present unilateralist obsession, to continue to live our lives in struggle against those structures, processes and persons that brought us to 9/11 and its aftermaths. Let us not surrender to the terror and violence that our Government is tempting us into, nor yield to our innermost desires for vindication and security. Instead, let us choose life over death. To live in this way, by intention, design, and structure, is to offer a possibility: to open space, and to keep time moving. Our life together as fellow pilgrims in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom becomes a site of hope and resistance; it returns us to our vocation as communities of Word and Deed. It proclaims, once again, our refusal to incarcerate, execute, and contain the human spirit; as well as reiterates our undying commitment to keep space open, and time moving, so that we can truly experience the enduring freedom, which is the birthright of all the peoples of our planet.

Morrisville, Pennsylvania  
July 13, 2003

**THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PAULINE  
THEOLOGY OF ΠΤΩΧΟΣ (PTOCHOS)  
AND ΠΤΩΧΕΙΑ (PTOCHEIA) TO THE  
CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF  
POOR AND POVERTY AMONG THE  
DEACONS OF THE CONVENTION OF  
PHILIPPINE BAPTIST CHURCHES IN THE  
PROVINCE OF ILOILO<sup>1</sup>**

*Dr. Bernabe C. Pagara*

**Summary of the Theological Concepts about Πτωχός  
and Πτωχεία in Pauline Literature**

The researcher recapitulates theological concepts gleaned from Paul's theology of πτωχός and πτωχεία based on the above exegesis of selected passages (Galatians 2:10, Romans 15:26-27, 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, 9).

First, Paul understands πτωχός in the literal sense, i.e. those who in some serious situation lacked the basic necessities to sustain life. Therefore, by "poor," he means the believers who were in economic need. This need was met by his collection from other churches. But at the

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<sup>1</sup> A dissertation presented to the faculty of the Philippine branch of the Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Theology. February 2003.

same time he recognizes all Christians as being slaves to sin and to some form of legal requirements and thus as marginalized and weak in the society. The good news for the poor Christians is that Jesus became a curse for them and delivered them from the curse of the law. Similarly, πτωχεία is used of the destitute condition of the saints in Judea.

Second, Paul's concept of πτωχός and πτωχεία is to be understood in terms of his apostolic ministry. Relief, solidarity, and love for the poor are fundamental to his apostolic office. Paul tells his readers that in response to Jerusalem pillars' request to remember the poor, he is already fully engaged in this task, and that it is nothing additional to the exercise of his apostolic office.

Third, Paul's caring for the πτωχός has both a propositional and an incarnational dimension to the life and mission of the church. Paul affirmed that true Christian spirituality is demonstrated in loving and caring for other Christians and other people outside the Body of Christ. Each member of the Body of Christ (Church) has a clear duty to contribute to one's material needs needed for everyday life.

Fourth, Paul's doctrinal basis of all Christian giving for the poor. In 2 Cor. 8:9, through Christ's poverty, the church receives in exchange abundant and lavish riches of grace. This becomes the foundational resource for mutual sharing. Christ's becoming poor is the paradoxical ground of the true riches of the believer. It is also the basis and example for Christian giving. Their giving is modeled after Christ, who sacrificed himself to meet our needs (8:8-9). Because God ultimately is the one who supplies our needs, we can give generously, sure that he will care for us when we have need (cf. 9:8-11).

Fifth, Paul's practical response through a fund campaign project would help alleviate πτωχεία and widespread suffering of the πτωχός. In Paul's ministry, the πτωχων were not forgotten but remembered for an ongoing financial assistance. The relief project was

designed to meet the needs as well as alleviate the widespread suffering. He organized it to meet a permanent demand for continuous help. In consequence, it aided to the understanding of the Church's mission to other nations.

Sixth, Paul enjoined the rich members of the church to help the poor in generous giving. Paul alludes to the grace of God whereby the rich members should give generously. Paul stressed that running the risk of poverty through generosity brings spiritual blessing (see 2 Cor. 8-9). There is freedom and independence of their decision to give. Even though monetary collections was the result of freewill offerings, the Christians need to consider it as indebtedness to other churches.

Moreover, Paul challenged the rich churches to provide for their own poor members (Rom. 12:13). Paul must be addressing the rich Christians that the proper use of wealth was almsgiving and sharing, as exemplified by the Apostle Paul himself (cf. Antioch Church, the Philippian church).<sup>2</sup> Paul demands that those who had possessions share with others in "simplicity" and to distribute to the necessity of the saints (Rom. 12:8,13). Paul does not command the distribution of wealth to bring about a leveled society, but the rich are to see their wealth as a gift God has given them to alleviate the needs of brothers and sisters. In the end, Paul noted that a greedy person has no place in the life of a Christian (Col. 3:5; Eph. 4:19; Rom. 1:29; 2 Cor. 2:11). Paul, therefore, enjoins the sharing of wealth to the poor as a ministry of service.

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<sup>2</sup> Tiano, Noel, "Luke's Teaching About the Poor and Its Implications for the Social Responsibilities of Luzon Southern Baptist Church Workers," Th. D. diss., Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary (Baguio City, 1993), 33. Further, he argues that if indeed there is more weight to the argument that a greater percentage of Paul's congregation belonged to the middle class, then his warnings on greed and teachings on social responsibilities for the poor would constitute a major thematic emphasis. *Ibid.*

Further, Paul's theology of giving is demonstrated through economic sharing. The sharing community in Jerusalem is "κοινωνία" (cf. Acts 2:24, 42-47; 4:32-51; Rom. 12:13; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:15; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13). In Paul's Christological model, within this new community of haves and have-nots called the church, socio-economic barriers are broken down (2 Cor. 8:4, 9:13; Gal. 6:6). The mutuality of the sharing (κοινωνία) of gifts and resources will move them toward "equality" (2 Cor. 8:13,14), though not a common community of goods. Economic sharing is to be characterized by spontaneity (2 Cor. 9:12), freedom (2 Cor. 9:7), and generosity (2 Cor. 8:14, 20, 9:5). Equality is closing the gap between rich and poor in the body of Christ so no one lacks. Gornik says that the reciprocity of resources, both spiritual and economic, during Paul's time, worked together to forge a new unity.<sup>3</sup> The sharing of resources was to be with the poor (Gal. 6:2, 10) and other churches (2 Cor. 8:34; 9:15; Rom. 15:25-27).

Similarly, Paul encourages churches to help the poor saints in other churches in order to share the pains with each other as members of the same body of Christ. Thus, financial gifts become sharing, not "giving" (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13).<sup>4</sup> For this reason, financial sharing becomes a "communal service," a "generosity," a "bountiful gift" or "grace."

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<sup>3</sup> Mark R. Gornik, "The Rich and Poor in Paul's Theology," available from

<http://www.modernreformation.org/mr92/julaug/mr9204richpoor.html>; Internet; accessed 01 December 2002, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Richards, 276. Mary Ann Getty notes that Paul capitalizes on the Greek notion that spiritual benefits have priority over the material, so that the Corinthians' own integrity would make them see how generous they should be in sharing their material goods (*The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, eds., D. Bergant and R. Harris [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994], 1145).

## Biblico-Theological Implications

The following are the biblico-theological implications: (1) all that humanity possesses belongs to God;<sup>5</sup> (2) the rich are favored by God;<sup>6</sup> (3) poor are not favored by God;<sup>7</sup> (4) poverty is a punishment from God;<sup>8</sup> (5) God has

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<sup>5</sup>The deacons strongly agree (93.8%) on the teaching of the Bible that all humanity possesses belongs to God. They believe that possessions are a sign of God's blessings or favor. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 133, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. Dr. Henry P. Silbor says that man is only a steward of that which God allows him to possess (Gen. 1:27-28; Deut. 8:18-20; I Cor. 6:19-20) ("Developing a Program for Stewardship Methods," Thesis [Baguio City, 1982], 6). This means that all the earth belongs to all God's people. Its riches are meant for all to be used for human need. God has provided humanity with enough resources on this earth so that all God's people are able to enjoy a comfortable life. God intends the well-being of all creatures. See Barnette, 147. Possessions are to be acquired honestly. To regard material property as a possession to be made use of without taking other people's rights into account is to ignore the biblical conviction that man is simply a steward of the goods of the earth. Thus, poverty is injustice and a breach of God's covenant caused by the greed of the rich. The strong and the powerful use their considerable resources not to further relationships which men are placed by God but in support of their own ends. See Boerma, 42. In this way they tear apart what is meant to be a unity. Because God is the Creator and Owner of everything, man as steward of God-given wealth, therefore, must free himself from avarice and greed.

<sup>6</sup>The empirical study shows that the respondents agree that rich people are favored by God. As indicated in the result of the survey, 78.8% of deacons support this view. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 133, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. This implies that the respondents are aware of the teachings in the Bible that God makes people prosperous and abundant not only in spiritual things but also in material blessings. Paul gives no concrete evidence for this but hints the idea figuratively in 2 Cor. 8:9.

<sup>7</sup>A majority (90.1%) of deacons also believes that poor are not favored by God. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 133, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. They believe that the Bible talks about abundant life in John 10:10 and other passages. In this variable, Paul is silent about the issue.

chosen some people to be poor;<sup>9</sup> (6) poverty is the result of laziness;<sup>10</sup> and (7) poverty is a physical problem.

### *Poverty is a Physical Problem*

The position of the respondents suggests that 55.1% of them agreed that poverty is a physical problem whereas 36.3% of them disagreed.<sup>11</sup> It can be observed

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<sup>8</sup>A majority of the respondents (90.1%) supports the idea that poverty is a punishment from God. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 133, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. They regard poverty as a blight upon human life, either as divine curse or as a self-inflicted wound. People become poor because of their sins and the sins of others. The respondents believe that to live a life of poverty is a retribution of one's sin and disobedience. Paul is also silent on this issue.

<sup>9</sup>A majority of the respondents (61.3%) believes that God has chosen some people to be poor. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 133, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. God did not choose that some people will be poor or rich but God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him (James 2:5). In this variable, Paul is also silent.

<sup>10</sup>A good percentage (77.5%) of the respondents disagreed with the question that poverty is a result of laziness. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. Paul and CPBC deacons do not hold similar view on this statement. It is a fact that there are poor because they refused to work. In a sense, they are lazy. They become habituated to gaining their living by begging, or other easy means. Beals says that a living condition of absolute poverty and an environment of hopelessness is not a productive seedbed to nurture a strong sense of self-reliance and personal initiative. See Art Beals, *Beyond Hunger: A Biblical Mandate for Social Responsibility* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1985), 204. It is very easy for such people to be discontented if their remuneration is not meeting their basic needs. Such people will always be susceptible to the lure of making "easy money." Hence, there is a need to re-educate the poor people of Iloilo regarding the value of work. There should also be a strong emphasis on training church leaders about this issue to help prevent poverty.

<sup>11</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 133-4, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.



that the economically *poor* are very much affected physically. Many are malnourished resulting to all kinds of diseases including their mental capacity to think and decide to improve their economic condition to the extent that they cannot provide themselves with the basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter and clothing. Because of the above life situation, there has been less economic development and a constant deterioration of the living standard from an abundant life of eating various kinds of food from farm products to a poverty stricken life, in which, rice becomes the staple food but rarely with side dishes. *Similarly, Paul used πτωχός to refer to the condition of economically poor believers in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9-10; 6:10; 2 Cor. 8:14; cf. Acts 6:2.). They are the “physically poor.”*<sup>12</sup> They are those who in some serious situation lacked the basic necessities to sustain life (cf. 1 Tim. 6:8).<sup>13</sup>

## **Ethical-Economic Implications**

The following implications are: (1) collection of funds for the poor relieves poverty; (2) participation in lottery can help ease poverty;<sup>14</sup> (3) distribution of relief goods is

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<sup>12</sup>See previous discussion in Chapter One (original dissertation), 66, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Galatians 2:10.”

<sup>13</sup>For further discussion, see Chapter One (original dissertation), 69, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Galatians 2:10.”

<sup>14</sup>Paul is silent on this issue. It is to be noted that 87.8% of the deacons indicate that joining in games and lotteries can help ease poverty. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 135, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion below. In the “Statement of Concern of CPBC” on gambling, it says, “In the face of worsening economic crisis, the Filipino people are offered venues for coping with the attendant problems of poverty. One of these is gambling: horse race, *jueting*, daily double, lotto – to mention but a few. The proliferation of lotto terminals and gambling casinos, the endless queues of people at lotto ticket counters, the incapacity of law enforcement agencies to crack down gambling syndicates all point to the fact that this vice is supported, if not perpetuated, by those who are in the higher echelons of power. We are appalled that

an expression of Christian love; (4) collection of funds on behalf of the poor is a noble act; (5) wealth is to be shared for use by the needy; (6) poverty is an economic reality; (7) the poor needs help from the rich; (8) extended family is a source of material support;<sup>15</sup> (9) and extended family is a liability.<sup>16</sup>

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instead of providing the people with the dignified means of livelihood, their hopes to survive are falsely raised; instead of encouraging the people to earn honest wages through the sweat of their brow, they are promised instant wealth, which benefits only a few individuals and not the society as a whole. See "Gambling: A Vicious Form of Exploitation," in *A Statement of Concern of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, Inc.*, 1. Majority of the respondents do not adhere to the statement of concern of CPBC Board of Trustees on this matter. For them, lottery gives them hope though it is a false hope. In addition, the Faith and Order Committee of CPBC posed the same concern, "The experience of poverty of the majority of our people and the sense of hopelessness and powerlessness that go with it make them gullible to emotional and supernatural influences. When times are hard and difficult, people tend to look for quick fix scheme in solving their problems. This is why miracle crusades are attractive and are always attended. Often what is presented is the so-called "prosperity gospel" ("And They Will Deceive Many," *A Statement about Cultic Groups and Teachings*), 2.

<sup>15</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 76.3% claimed that extended family is a source of material support. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 135, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. Paul does not reflect this view.

<sup>16</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 42.5% reflected that they "agree," but on the opposite side, 42.6% of the respondents said that they "disagree" that extended family is a liability. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 135, referring to table 10. More than half of them disagreed that extended family is a liability. However, in essence it is a liability. In many instances, one person in the family, especially if employed, becomes an asset for the rest and the rest becomes a liability or dependent. Paul again is silent on this matter.

## *Collection of Funds for the Poor Relieves Poverty*

The study shows that 52.5% of deacons believed that collection of money for the poor relieves poverty while 37.5% of the respondents disagreed with the view.<sup>17</sup> The question posed is, 'Is it ethical to collect funds for the poor people?' As such the deacons think that this activity might lead into dependency resulting to laziness from lack of personal initiative. However, accountability on this issue is enjoined with the recipients. As noted in chapter one, the early church established communities of sharing (Acts 4:32). So they had enough resources and there was no poverty. The famine-stricken communities were financially supported by the collection made by believers elsewhere. *Διακονία* ("service") is foundational to Christian life and community. In a similar fashion, the deacons adhere to the idea of Paul that collection should be directed to the poor (see 2 Cor. 8:4; Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10).<sup>18</sup> Indication of a more universal reference is found in other texts, which apply to non-believers.<sup>19</sup> In a world of inequality, enmity, injustice and greed, the church is called to live out the biblical model for the Christian community.

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<sup>17</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>18</sup>Refer to the discussion of the section "Summary of the Theological Concepts about *Πτωχός* and *Πτωχεία* in Pauline Literature", 114, of Chapter One (original dissertation).

<sup>19</sup>Paul enjoins hospitality in its literal sense of love for or care of strangers, here meaning non-believers since it contrasts the immediately preceding injunction of sharing with fellow Christians ("saints") and the following stipulation of love to one's enemies (cf. 1 Thess. 3:12; 5:15; 2 Cor. 9:13; Phil. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:24; Tit. 3:2, 8). See *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, s.v. "Ethics," by S. C. Mott.

## *Distribution of Relief Goods is an Expression of Christian Love*

The survey reveals that 91.3% of the deacons support the view that distribution of relief goods is an expression of Christian love.<sup>20</sup> They believe that faith without works or actions is dead. They affirm the passage in James, “What good is there in your saying to them ‘God bless you!’ ‘keep warm,’ if you don’t give them the necessities of life” (James 2:15). In addition, Paul urges the rich Corinthian members to complete their collection for the relief of the needy Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8-9).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Paul solicits generous participation in the collection by referring to the exemplary behavior of the Macedonian churches (in view of their own profound “poverty” (2 Cor. 8:2)).<sup>22</sup> Poor relief of various kinds was thus established, though sharing of goods was not attempted.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>21</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 90, under the subsection “Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 8:1-2,9,” and under the section “Summary of the Chapter” (original dissertation), 109. If Paul were among us today, he would encourage us to serve within the local context by using local resources to meet the local needs of churches, because that is exactly what he did. See Christopher R. Little, “Whatever Happened to the Apostle Paul? An Exposition of Paul’s Teaching and Practice of Giving,” *Mission Frontiers* 23:3 (September 2001): 25.

<sup>22</sup>See the discussion of the subsection on “Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 8:1-2,9”, 99, of Chapter One (original dissertation).

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.* At their first appearance (Acts 6:1) the Hellenists complain in the rapidly growing Christian community in Jerusalem that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of money or food. Acts 6:1-6; 15:1-35 and Gal. 2:1-14 suggest that there was debate within as well as between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch. See Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), s.v. “Hellenism,” by G. R. Stanton.

## *Collection of Funds on behalf of the Poor is a Noble Act*

The result of the survey reveals that more than half of the respondents (51.3%) shared the view that collection of funds on behalf of the poor is a noble act.<sup>24</sup> Culturally, we, Filipinos, have imbibed from the Spaniards the belief that helping the *poor* can help lessen one's sins. Also, the appeal to generous and ungrudging care is linked with the promise of the Lord's blessing to those who give freely.

On the other hand, Paul was actively engaged in organizing a collection among the churches of Asia and Greece for "the poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8-9). In this way, the churches expressed their special concern for the poor, even if they did not follow the example of the Jerusalem community of meeting all needs out of a common purse. Further, Paul tells us that on his first visit to the community in Jerusalem, he had explained his mission to James, Cephas and John, who recognized that he had been commissioned to preach to the pagans, and agreed that he should continue to do so, laying down the sole condition that he and his followers should remember to help the *poor* (Gal.2:9-10).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Paul, in his use of the sowing-reaping metaphor, sums up all the reasons why the Corinthians should give generously to the collection and does not hesitate to appeal to selfish motives as well as noble ones. For him, generous giving is an act of worship, which gives thanks to God for his gifts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>25</sup>Refer to the section, "The Exegesis of Galatians 2:10," under "Exegesis of Related Passages in Pauline Literature", 70-71, of Chapter One (original dissertation).

<sup>26</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10. In Gal. 2:1-10, the other concession made by the Gentile Christians was the financial collection for the poor in Jerusalem. Generosity will not

## *Wealth is to Be Shared for Use by the Needy*

Of the eighty total respondents, 86.3% indicated that wealth is to be shared for use by the needy.<sup>27</sup> The survey reveals that Iloilo's *poor* sees poverty as material deprivation. It also reveals the marginalization and the oppression of the poor. The marginalized are the unemployed, the beggars, the abandoned children, the prostitutes, and others. The exploited are the "working poor" as well as the rural and urban workers. Therefore, they are not to be generally blamed for their poverty. For them, poverty means lack of opportunity, etc. It has been observed that the reciprocity of resources, both spiritual and economic, during Paul's time, worked together to forge a new unity. The sharing of resources was to be with the poor (Gal. 6:2, 10) and other churches (2 Cor. 8:34; 9:15; Rom. 15:25-27).<sup>28</sup> Paul demands that those who had possessions share with others in "simplicity" and to distribute to the necessity of the saints who were needy (Rom. 12:8,13). Paul does not command the distribution of wealth to bring about a leveled society, but the rich are to see their wealth as a gift God has given

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leave one impoverished, but will allow God to give even more to the giver. The no-so-subtle threat here is that God will not bless those who refuse to give generously. So giving generously is truly in the Corinthians' best interests. They can glorify God and ensure further blessings for themselves at the same time. See *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, s.v. "Financial Support," by J. M. Everts.

<sup>27</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>28</sup>Refer to Chapter One (original dissertation), 113-14, under the section on "Summary of Theological Concepts about *Πτωχός* and *Πτωχεία* in Pauline Literature," of Chapter One (original dissertation). Economic sharing with other churches, even though many of the Corinthian believers were of little financial means, was to be a regular part of their communal life (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The sharing of resources was to be with the poor (Gal. 2:10, other churches (2 Cor. 8:34, 9:15; Rom. 15:25-27). This community of sharing was part of what it meant to be the servant people of God (Phil. 1:5; 2 Cor. 8:15).

them to help alleviate the needs of fellow human beings.<sup>29</sup>

Possessions and property must be looked after, assessed and distributed in such a way that every member of the community has his fair share. One man's prosperity is closely connected with that of others. You cannot be rich by yourself.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the wealth of the rich is purged and transformed into mutual help and support. The poverty of the poor is transformed in the same way.

### *Poverty is an Economic Reality*

In this variable, of the eighty total respondents, 81.3% reflected that poverty is an economic reality.<sup>31</sup> The poor in Iloilo are those who depend their livelihood mainly on agriculture. They are bond-labourers and suppressed by the rich. Others, because of their landlessness and joblessness, have to accept whatever wages they can get to stay alive. Also, the "small landowners" are finding their livelihood threatened by the advance of "agribusiness." In other words, the ordinary farmers cannot cope with the need to improve their farm equipments, buy grains, pesticides, fertilizers, and etc., for greater production output. The tenant-farmers till the land for the landowners and get only a small share of the harvest. On the other hand, small landowners are not able to pay back capital they have invested because of the small return they get from their farm products due to the presence of middle persons. Economically, poverty

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<sup>29</sup>Consult Chapter One (original dissertation), 112-3, under the section, "Summary of Theological Concepts about *Πτωχός* and *Πτωχία* in Pauline Literature."

<sup>30</sup>Conrad Boerma, *The Rich, the Poor and the Bible* (Philadelphia: PA: The Westminster Press, 1980),69.

<sup>31</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

results from the denial of their labour, which deprives them of their dignity and opportunity.

However, in Paul's Christological model, within this new community of haves and have-nots, called the church, socio-economic barriers are broken down (2 Cor. 8:4, 9:13; Gal. 6:6). The mutuality of the sharing ("κοινωνία") of gifts and resources will move them toward "equality" (2 Cor. 8:13,14), though not a common community of goods.<sup>32</sup> As stated previously, Paul used the term πτωχός to refer to the condition of economically poor, that is, those who in some serious situation lacked the basic necessities to sustain life. They are those who were in economic need.

### *The Poor Needs Help from the Rich*

Of the eighty total respondents, 75% claimed that the poor person needs help from the rich.<sup>33</sup> Money and possessions are necessary because poor people need them to live a decent life. The rich becomes an instrument capable of acting justly and rediscovering the joy of corporate living. The poor people's chance to have a better life lies on the generosity of the rich to share their material blessings. However, dole-outs are discouraged and corresponding accountability from the poor is expected. Aptly, the saying states, "Give a man a fish and he will have a meal, teach him how to fish and he will have food for life."

In 2 Cor. 8-9, Paul urges the rich Corinthian members to complete their collection for the relief of the needy Christians in Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> Paul alludes to the

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<sup>32</sup>Read Chapter One (original dissertation), 113, under the section, "Summary of Theological Concepts about Πτωχός and Πτωχεία in Pauline Literature."

<sup>33</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 134, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>34</sup>See findings in Chapter One (original dissertation), 90, under the subsection on "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 8:1-2,9."



grace of God whereby the rich members should give generously to the welfare of the poor. Just as Christ freely gave up His riches in heaven so too should believers give up riches for others. Paul stressed that running the risk of poverty through generosity brings spiritual blessing (see 2 Cor. 8-9).<sup>35</sup> There is freedom and independence of their decision to give.<sup>36</sup> Paul was saying that the wealthy are to be rich in good deeds and economic sharing toward the poor (1 Tim. 6:18; cf. 2 Cor. 8:21).<sup>37</sup>

### **Socio-Political Implications**

The following implications are: (1) good governance can improve one's economic condition;<sup>38</sup> (2) rich people oppress the poor; (3) poverty is caused by graft and corruption; (4) misuse of wealth is a source of inequality; (5) unemployment results in poverty; (6) poverty is

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<sup>35</sup>Consult the discussions in Chapter One (original dissertation), 103, under the subheading on "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 8:1-2,9" and the section on "Summary of Theological Concepts about *Πτωχός* and *Πτωχεία* in Pauline Literature," 111-2.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 104-5, 111.

<sup>37</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 114, under the section on "Summary of Theological Concepts about *Πτωχός* and *Πτωχεία* in Pauline Literature."

<sup>38</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 61.3% reflected that they "agree", and 33.8% claimed that they "strongly agree." See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 136-7, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. In the present context, the poor people's condition reflects an administration that is pro-rich and consequently tolerates graft and corruption. Similarly, there is no or lack of transparency of the different aspects of administration such as, budget for different government projects, no proper implementation of public funds and honest execution of law and ordinances, etc. On the other hand, in Hellenistic Judaism, the ideal government would distribute for "the necessary needs" of life so that there would be no "excess for luxury" nor lack (Philo *Jos.* 243). That the recipients are the poor and that this standard of justice is applied reveal elements of a social ethic. See *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, s.v. "Ethics," by S.C. Mott.

caused by economic oppression;<sup>39</sup> and (7) the poor are financially disadvantaged.<sup>40</sup>

### *Rich People Oppress the Poor*

Of the eighty total respondents, 62.5% claimed that rich people oppress the poor. On the opposite side, 22.6% of the respondents disagree.<sup>41</sup> This is observed and experienced especially from those *hacenderos*, (“big landowners”) where the tenants and workers are victims of exploitation and oppression. The “poor” people in Iloilo include small landowners whose income depend mainly from their harvest, the tenant farmers who had to pay the due to their landlords before providing for their own families, the hired laborers, fishermen, carpenters, vendors, beggars, etc. The practice of usury, which charges 20% interest or more of the principal amount borrowed (money used to buy seedlings, pesticides,

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<sup>39</sup>Moreover, in the survey, of the eighty total respondents, 73.8% percent claimed that they “strongly agree” that poverty is caused by economic oppression. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 137, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. At present, the people are heavily taxed in more ways than one. Moreover, the uncontrolled pricing of basic commodities such as gas and other petroleum products affect other basic needs such as food and transportation. Likewise, during Paul’s time, people as a whole were heavily taxed. The head tax, which the Romans required, usually in connection with a census, was collected by the Jewish administration. It was the goods and services tax which burdened the people most heavily and which, in fact, caused the greatest economic hardship. Obviously, the people hurt most by the excessive taxation responded with anger and resentment. See Chapter One (original dissertation), 78-9, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27.” See also Pilgrim, 52.

<sup>40</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 57.5% reflected that they “agree,” and 17.5% claimed that the poor are financially disadvantaged. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 137, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>41</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 137, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

fertilizers, etc.) is rampant.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, most of the poor borrowers can only pay the interest of the borrowed amount. Most of the people lived in economic poverty and low social status resulting to low morale and unproductiveness of both body and mind. Moreover, the government is imposing taxes (withholding, transportation, property, inheritance, value added taxes [VAT], custom, and others) that poor people are burdened to pay. Some of the government officials through their different so-called projects are able to enrich themselves financially. During Paul's time, numerous complaints show that the taxes were generally felt to be oppressive. There were religious taxes in addition to the state ones. Overburdened by taxes and forced labor, people in towns avoided public service, and the majority of Roman citizens became indifferent to the fate of Rome.<sup>43</sup>

Today, with a measure of wealth it is possible for the rich to use the power of wealth to gain more. This power can be used to restrict or deprive those without power in situations of injustice. Some gain a monopoly on wealth and resources, and social relations become imbalanced. It cannot be denied that our economy is set up for the benefit of the few and the exploitation of the many. The elite who have the power resources as well as the political clout around them, suppress the poor and take away their rights to natural resources and properties. It is believed that all human beings have a right to those basic things that are needed to sustain human life with some semblance of dignity. If human beings have a right to those things that are necessary for sustaining human life, then someone somewhere is under obligation to provide

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<sup>42</sup>P. H. Davids puts it, the "poor lived on the edge of existence even in the best of times, for to be in an agricultural economy without owning sufficient productive land to provide security is to be economically marginal." See Davids, 703.

<sup>43</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 79, under the subsection on "Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27."

those rights. The rich must be on board if the rights of the poor are to be met. Just as the teaching function of the apostle Paul was crucial in bringing the churches that were established in the New Testament era to maturity, pastors and church spiritual leaders entrusted with the apostle's instructions have the same function today.

### *Poverty is Caused by Graft and Corruption*

Of the eighty total respondents, 72.6% agree that poverty is caused by graft and corruption.<sup>44</sup> Red tape is rampant. Hence, poverty is the result of corruption for many years. Sadly, government officials and employees are taking bribes, charging interest, making unfulfilled promises, and plundering. Some officials have even become callous to the sufferings inflicted by injustices to the *poor*. Thus, the poor people are overlooked by government officials. However, in Paul's ministry, the *πτωχων* were not forgotten but remembered for an ongoing financial assistance. His relief project was designed to meet the needs as well as alleviate the widespread suffering of the poor. He organized the said project not for his needs but to meet a permanent demand for continuous help of the poor.<sup>45</sup>

### *Misuse of Wealth is a Source of Inequality*

Of the eighty total respondents, 78% reflected that misuse of wealth is a source of inequality.<sup>46</sup> The plundering of financial resources, inappropriate project priorities, republic acts and laws of our government are

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<sup>44</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 137, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>45</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 111, under the section on "Summary of Theological Concepts about *Πτωχός* and *Πτωχεία* in Pauline Literature."

<sup>46</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 137, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

issues to consider. One clear example is RA 7941 that places Philippine resources and patrimony under foreign control and exploitation under the so-called Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA). A further statement of concern by the Convention Baptist Ministers' Association (CBMA) says,

“RA 7942 otherwise known as the Mining Act of 1995 also gives auxiliary rights such as timber rights, water rights, easement rights, right to enter into private land and concessions, freedom from expropriation, right to arbitration and confidentiality. Giving foreign mining companies all these rights is nothing but a whole sale of our national patrimony to foreign capitalists and relegates our country into mere suppliers of raw materials and cheap labor. Such wholesale of our natural resources is unthinkable for a sovereign country like the Philippines. This Act mainly satisfies the greed for monetary gains of both foreign and local capitalists who would now, after raping and denuding our forest reserves, now commit the final act of plundering the very bowels of the earth to extract what ought to be our birthright. It is destructive to the environment because it will result to the denudation and destruction of our mountains and the very small forest reserves left. This law is indirectly and ultimately anti-people because when our forest reserves are gone and our mountains denuded, we shall continually suffer from flash floods, water shortage, and unprecedented drought. This law will have a tremendous adverse effect to food production, climate, ecological balance and human survival in general.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>This Statement of Concern was endorsed by the Convention Baptist Ministers' Association during its National Assembly on January 21-24, 1997 in Iloilo City. RA 7942 poses the biggest threat to the Philippine environment and ecological balance. Ibid.

We are stewards, not destroyers of God's creation (Ps. 24:1-2; Gen. 1:28-30). The church has the duty to teach and witness to certain basic truths about the human person and certain fundamental values that ought to be respected in society. The Church should not exist for its pious club-members but rather for the needs of the society and it should act as the salt and light of the society.

The world, during Paul's time, was marked with differences between the large group of poor people and a small, rich upper class. Many agree that closely related to wealth and poverty in Paul's time is the issue of social status. Moreover, the great figures in the land owned the most fertile areas. The Roman economic system brought class divisions among the people. The effect of these so-called social classes resulted to poor people living in wooden houses crowded closely together.<sup>48</sup> In his ethical admonitions Paul did not require complete abolition of differences in means, but looked for active and effective brotherly love (2 Cor. 8:13ff.). This means that the 'abundance' of some is to supply the 'want' of the brethren (in Jerusalem) 'that there may be equality.'

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<sup>48</sup>Consult the discussions in Chapter One (original dissertation), 78, under the subsection on "Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27" and the section on "Summary of Theological Concepts about Πτωχός and Πτωχεία in Pauline Literature," 113-4. The class distinctions among the Romans were based mainly on wealth. The upper-class was composed of landowners, merchants, and professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers, and government officials). The lower-class were laborers, farmers, and trade workers. See Chapter One (original dissertation), 62-3, under the discussion on the section "Exegetical Studies of Related Passages for Πτωχός and Πτωχεία in Selected Pauline Literature." The norm, Paul suggests, is something like economic equality among the people of God (2 Cor. 8:13-15). Just as God had insisted on equal proportions of manna for all his people in the wilderness, so now the Corinthians should give "that there may be equality" in the body of Christ. See further Sider, 97.

## *Unemployment Results in Poverty*

Of the eighty total respondents, 52.5% reflected that they “agree,” and 30.0% claimed that they “strongly agree.”<sup>49</sup> In 1992 unemployment, as defined by the Philippine government stood at 9.8%. Per capita GNP growth at that time registered at .06%. By 1993, with the dramatic rise to 2.77% in per capita GNP growth, unemployment went down slightly to 9.3%. At the end of 1994, with even higher growth at 5.1%, unemployment paradoxically rose up to 5.5%, unemployment increased to 11.9%.

Moreover, the picture in terms of unemployed human beings is telling: 1992, 2.594 million; 1993, 2.497 million; and in 1994 2.622 million. In Region VI, labor and employment rates based on the monthly update (September 2002) of NSO’s most requested statistics, unemployment rate is 9.9% and underemployment rate is 24.8% in relation to the population. Region VI has the income gap of 31.0% lower than the estimate at the national level.<sup>50</sup> This shows that the income gaps had worsened from 1992 to 2002. Truly, a scenario of jobless growth!<sup>51</sup> In Paul’s time, there was a large number of poor people living in Jerusalem. Christians suffered due to religious ill-will and social persecution by the Jewish religious groups. As a result, many Christians were unable to find work to support themselves and their families due to religious ill-will, social persecution, and over-population.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 137, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>50</sup>This information is based on NSO Quickstat on Region VI – Western Visayas (September 2002).

<sup>51</sup><http://www.socwatch.org.uy/1996/philippi.html>. It comes as no surprise that the nation’s poorest are also the nation’s unemployed. See Perkins, 97.

<sup>52</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 67, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Galatians 2:10.”

## Contextual-Situational Implications

The following are the contextual-situational implications: (1) poverty is not caused by natural calamities such as floods and droughts; (2) people born into poor families can become rich;<sup>53</sup> (3) poverty can lead to an increase in criminality;<sup>54</sup> (4) poverty results in poor

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<sup>53</sup>Of the eighty respondents, 88.8% disagree and only 3.8% agree that people born into poor families can become rich. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 140, referring to table 10. In Iloilo, because of the lack of education, they have no choice for better means of employment, hence, they cannot improve their condition. They are the victims of the oppressive and unjust social system. There is a deep “sense of hopelessness” due to the unfulfilled promises of politicians and government officials. They have lost confidence in the values of the society. Overburdened by taxes and the presence of graft and corruption, people no longer felt the drive or motivation to sustain the momentum and to strive for more. They become discouraged and indifferent to the fate of the nation. On the other hand, Paul is silent on this matter. However, in his time, there was a serious economic crisis. Stephen Neill notes that the widespread use of slave labor discouraged economic growth (*A History of Christian Missions* [London, England: Penguin Press, 1964], 24). Even the Romans seldom looked for new ways of producing goods and the wealthy had no interest in starting new businesses. See *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 52.5% reflected that they “agree,” and 35.0% claimed that they “strongly agree.” See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. There are those who are poor due to bad choices (drunkards, gamblers, drug addicts and others) and there are those who were forced to make wrong choices because they do not have any choice at all. As the saying goes, “*Kahit sa patalim kumakapit.*” For many, these uncontrolled vices keep them poor and destitute. They are forced by the hard and difficult circumstances to take shelter on such vices to alleviate for a moment their deep-seated condition. In most cases, they are trapped into such bad habits by their circumstance, which they don’t realize adds to their poverty. It is observed that one of the effects of poverty in Iloilo is the increase in criminality, which is a result of unemployment. Some people who are unemployed are forced to steal, rob, sell prohibited drugs, and the like for them to provide food on the table. There is a need of conscientization of society, radical change in the attitude and structures of society, and, of course, looking beyond for divine



health condition;<sup>55</sup> (5) poverty leads to prostitution; (6) squatting by homeless people is a result of poverty; (7) gambling leads to poverty;<sup>56</sup> (8) illiteracy causes

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intervention. In the same way, the natural catastrophes of the first century A.D. may have had more serious consequences than those of the previous century.

We hear nothing of comparable state aid from the period of direct Roman administration (after A.D. 6), but only of private initiatives (Acts 11:28; Antt. 20.2.5). This had momentous consequences, as is shown by the increase in robbery and rebellion in subsequent years. See Chapter One (original dissertation), 96, under the subsection on "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 8:1-2,9." On this issue, pastors and church leaders should strongly advocate that the good news to the poor consists of bold confrontations and change in the existing order of the societal practices to protect the poor from the institutionalized crimes.

<sup>55</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 88.8% reflected that poverty results in poor health condition. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10. Iloilo City alone is characterized by surviving and poor slum barangays with a very low family income. It is also observed that there is a high incidence of communicable diseases in these kinds of communities. Furthermore, children at school age in these communities are malnourished and there are still children classified as second degree under-nourished.

<sup>56</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 86.3% claimed that gambling leads to poverty. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10 and the following discussion. In Iloilo, there is the presence of rampant gambling such as *jueteng*, daily double, lotto - to mention but a few. The CPBC Board of Trustees condemned the flourishing presence of these games, to wit: "We are appalled that instead of providing the people with the dignified means of livelihood, their hopes to survive are falsely raised; instead of encouraging the people to earn honest wages through the sweat of their brow, they are promised instant wealth which benefits only a few individuals and not the society as a whole; instead of empowering the poor to release themselves from the debilitating clutches of poverty, gambling lords take advantage of the situation of the poor by perpetuating a vicious cycle of dependence which destroy the moral fiber of the citizens, and therefore the entire nation (see *CPBC Statement of Concern*, 3). In reality, gambling is a multifaceted problem with tentacles, which reach deep into society to touch not only society through rising crime rate, economics and politics but also the individual and the family unit. See Martin, 125. Paul did mention in general about immoral acts when he admonished church members in Romans about stealing, desiring what

poverty;<sup>57</sup> (9) poverty is a hindrance to good education;<sup>58</sup> and (10) hard work results in survival despite poverty.<sup>59</sup>

### *Poverty is not Caused by Natural Calamities such as Floods and Droughts*

Of the eighty deacons, 51.3% agree and 45% disagree that poverty is not caused by natural calamities such as floods and droughts.<sup>60</sup> There are those who have become poor due to natural calamities such as floods, and droughts. Natural calamities affect the lives of thousands of people every year. The poor are the first ones to be affected by them. When such calamities occur, they lose everything in such calamities or have

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belongs to someone else – all these and any others besides (Rom. 13:9).

<sup>57</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 70% claimed that illiteracy causes poverty. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10 and the following discussion. There are places in Iloilo where the literacy level is very low which may have been brought by jobless people or by unemployment. In some cases, mothers are forced to find a job outside the home, thereby leaving the younger children behind under the care of older children in the family. As a result, the older children are deprived of further education. See Huelar, 3. Again, Paul is also silent on this matter.

<sup>58</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 60% agree whereas on the opposite side, 40% of the respondents disagree. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10. Many children do not have access to pre-school education. Parents cannot normally afford to send their children to private education because it is expensive. Paul further is silent on this issue.

<sup>59</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 86.3% claimed that hard work results in survival despite poverty. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139-40, referring to table 10. Filipinos are compared to a bamboo tree, which is pliant and resilient and able to adjust to any circumstances in life. Even in the worst poverty situation they can find something to work with their hands. They show their creativity and ingenuity in utilizing scrapped materials and other means to earn in order to survive. As it is mentioned before, they work for a very low daily wage rate in order to eat and survive.

<sup>60</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10.

nothing to cling on to. Often times, without any money or skills to survive, they continue to remain poor.

Furthermore, aids or assistance from the government or private sectors for the victims are usually not received in full. Iloilo as an agricultural province suffers from floods and droughts affecting the lives and properties of the farmers and that of their families. Similarly, during Paul's time, while many Gentile converts were financially comfortable, the Jerusalem church had suffered from the effects of a severe famine (see Acts 11:28-30) [A.D. 25], a drought [A.D. 65], a hurricane [A.D. 64], an earthquake [A.D. 31], and epidemics [A.D. 29], and was struggling.<sup>61</sup>

### *Poverty Leads to Prostitution*

Of the eighty total respondents, 63.8% claimed that Poverty leads to prostitution.<sup>62</sup> There are women who are forced by economic pressures to sell their bodies. There are those who believe that it is their only means of survival. Others used this as stepping stone to have a better life such as using their income for education and support for younger siblings and/or family (isolated cases reveal that daughters of poor parents sold or rented them for money).

Though Paul is silent on this, according to Brian Rosner, the immoral lifestyle of the Corinthians,

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<sup>61</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 96, under the subsection on "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 8:1-2,9."

<sup>62</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10 and the following corresponding discussion. Of 1,200,000 street children in the Philippines, 100,000 are estimated to be involved in prostitution. The average annual increase of prostitution of children is 3,266. The Philippines' rank is fourth as the country with the highest number of prostituted children. For example, there are about 50,000 to 70,000 street children in Manila alone. See Michael Scott Knight, "Literary Research about Street Children: Around the World and Specifically in the Philippines," Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, (September, 2001), 22.

prostitution in particular, was a part of their social, economic and religious existence.<sup>63</sup>

### *Squatting by Homeless People is a Result of Poverty*

Of the eighty total respondents, 76.3% claimed that squatting by homeless people is a result of poverty.<sup>64</sup> The Philippines has 32,894,317 children who are below the age of eighteen. They make up almost forty-five percent (44.98%) of the total Philippine population of 73,130,985 in 1995. The total population of the Philippines as of May 1, 2000 is 76.5 million.<sup>65</sup> In the Philippines, the Department of Social Welfare and Development estimated that there are about 1,200,000 homeless street children. And this number rises annually by 6,365 children.<sup>66</sup> It cannot be denied that Iloilo City alone has a number of homeless, especially homeless children, who roam and beg in the streets. This problem has threatened the divine justice and human dignity. In Paul's time, the Roman economic system brought class divisions among the people. The class distinctions among the Romans were based mainly on wealth. There was a great contrast between rich and poor in the Roman world. Though Paul does not mention of the same situation, the effect of these so-called social classes resulted to poor people living in wooden houses crowded closely together in the

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<sup>63</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 88, under the subsection on "Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27."

<sup>64</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 139, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>65</sup>2000 Census of Population and Housing Highlights, *National Statistics Office, 2000 FIES Final Results*, March 2002, xviii.

<sup>66</sup>Michael Scott Knight, "An analysis of the Need for Social Ministry Classes at Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines," M. Div. Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, (December 2001),22.

countryside, whereas the upper-class Romans lived in luxurious town houses.<sup>67</sup>

## **Practical-Incarnational Implications**

The following implications are as follows: (1) almsgiving is an expression of Christian generosity;<sup>68</sup> (2) relief efforts for the poor are an important testimony for Christian ministry; (3) rich churches should financially share with poor churches; (4) a life of poverty is modeled by Jesus in the Bible; (5) poverty can be eased through functional education;<sup>69</sup> (6) the rich can make use of their God-given wealth to help the poor; and (7) poverty can be minimized by the pooling of resources for the needy.

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<sup>67</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 78, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27.” See also Theissen, 41.

<sup>68</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 73.8% claimed that almsgiving is an expression of Christian generosity. See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 142, referring to table 10. As the saying goes, “You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving.” In the same way, the deacons believe in benevolent offerings collected by the church for those who are in need. Almsgiving is still applicable today. Though, in Paul’s time, the Holy City (Jerusalem) was the favorite location for the rabbis and their students who were dependent on charity. Since almsgiving in Yahweh’s city was thought to be an especially meritorious act, the poor in general naturally drifted to Jerusalem. See Chapter One (original dissertation), 68-9, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27.”

<sup>69</sup>Of the eighty total respondents, 78.8% reflected that they “agree,” and 11.3% claimed that they “strongly agree.” See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 142, referring to table 10. Poor education has many obvious consequences: underemployment or unemployment, poor nutrition, bad housing conditions, ill health, bad retirement, and powerlessness to use the system for one’s benefit. Education and quality of life are directly related. Lacking a good education means lacking among other things, access to the very doorway that leads to a wholesome life-style. Paul is also silent about this.

## *Relief Efforts for the Poor are an Important Testimony for Christian Ministry*

In the above variable, of the eighty respondents, 61.3% reflected that they “agree,” and 15.0% claimed that they “strongly agree.”<sup>70</sup> Paul uses the term *κοινωνία* (here “contribution”) to emphasize the sense of sharing in a common cause (in this case, the relief of the needy Christians in Jerusalem) at some cost.<sup>71</sup> For Paul, the intimate fellowship in the body of Christ has concrete economic implications, for he uses precisely the word *κοινωνία*, to designate financial sharing among believers (Gal. 2:10). Indeed, this financial sharing was just one part of a total fellowship. Economic sharing was an obvious and crucial part of Christian fellowship and ministry for Paul.<sup>72</sup>

## *Rich churches Should Financially Share with Poor Churches*

As indicated in the survey, of the eighty total respondents, 91.3% claimed that rich churches should financially share with poor churches.<sup>73</sup> The deacons believe that helping the poor churches especially in their finances will help them focus on the ministry or task given to them rather than in concentrating their effort in reaching their financial obligation. Paul assumed the task of demonstrating his commitment to the community in Jerusalem by calling upon other congregations to support the new congregation financially. He made the

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<sup>70</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 142, referring to table 10.

<sup>71</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 113, under the section on “Summary of the Theological Concepts of *Πτωχός* and *Πτωχεία* in Pauline Literature.”

<sup>72</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 75, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27.” See also Sider, 95.

<sup>73</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 142, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

Macedonian churches as a clear example for the rich Gentile Christians.<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, in 2 Cor. 8:1-2, Gal. 2:10, and Rom. 15:26-27 (see also 1 Cor. 16:1-4), the Apostle Paul had this desire to collect an offering from the Gentile churches, which were somewhat wealthy, in order to give it to the poor saints in Jerusalem who were in dire need.

### *A Life of Poverty is Modeled by Jesus in the Bible*

Majority of the respondents (67.6%) of the respondents indicate that a life of poverty is modeled by Jesus in the Bible.<sup>75</sup> The deacons view this present life as a life of abundance and prosperity rather than a life of poverty. For the respondents poverty is a personal and godly choice.

On the other hand, for Paul, through Christ's poverty, the church receives in exchange abundant and lavish riches of grace (2 Cor. 2:4; 5:18, 9:15), which become the foundational resource for mutual sharing. Christ's becoming poor is the paradoxical ground of the true riches of the believer. It is also the basis and example for Christian giving.<sup>76</sup> Paul is showing the implications of divine solidarity for solidarity among believers. Here Paul is drawing out the implications of divine solidarity and applying them to behavior among human beings. Paul saw in Jesus Christ God's solidarity with poor humanity. Paul's model, in imitation of Christ, of downward mobility and relinquishment of an esteemed status for the sake of the Gospel remains a strong challenge for the wealthy to identify with the poor and lowly in the society. John Perkins, Viv Grigg, and others have underscored this in

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<sup>74</sup>Refer to Chapter One (original dissertation), 98, under the subsection on "Exegesis of 2 Cor. 8:1-2,9."

<sup>75</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 143, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation.

<sup>76</sup>Refer to Chapter One (original dissertation), 102-5, under the subsection on "Exegesis of 2 Cor. 8:1-2,9."

terms of the “concept of relocation.”<sup>77</sup> Relocation is making a community of need our home.<sup>78</sup> This practice is viable and possible for big local churches.

### *The Rich Can Make Use of their God-given Wealth to Help the Poor*

Of the eighty total respondents, 85% claim that the rich can make use of their God-given wealth to help the poor.<sup>79</sup> Out of their generosity, voluntarily individual rich Christians or local churches have the chance and opportunity to extend monetary help or other means for the poor members. The deacons hope that conversion will take place in the hearts of the rich and they should live by God’s grace. Their possessions will no longer be the basis for their life nor a destructive power. The deacons believe that the rich were allowed a chance of salvation if they lived modestly and distributed their possessions generously to the poor. Riches, on the other hand, are given by God to be used in the service of the poor. That the rich Christians (first century) among them gave with overflowing generosity to meet a desperate need in the body of Christ indicates not naïve idealism but unconditional discipleship. The costly sharing of the first church stands as a constant challenge to Christians

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<sup>77</sup>Christians work together in terms of mobilizing spiritual and physical resources in and for communities of need through the Church. See John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 184. If a church were to be planted in the city, it would have to address the economic issues in the process of its maturing and discipling of the poor. See further Viv Grigg, *Cry of the Urban Poor* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1992), 56, 73.

<sup>78</sup>If urban evangelism is to be truly to the whole world, this call cannot be neglected.

<sup>79</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 142, referring to table 10. See also discussions on “The Rich Churches Should Financially Share with Poor Churches” and “The Poor Needs Help from the Rich” of this Chapter.



of all ages. They dared to give concrete, visible expression to the oneness of believers. The result was far-reaching economic liability for and financial availability to the other brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>80</sup> This implies good stewardship as indicated in 1 Cor. 4:1, and 2 Cor. 8:8.

*Poverty Can Be Minimized by the Pooling of Resources for the Needy*

Of the eighty total respondents, 88.8% claimed that poverty can be minimized by the pooling of resources for the needy.<sup>81</sup> The church at Jerusalem is a classical illustration of a larger sharing of life.<sup>82</sup> “All who became Christians were together and held all they had for the common use. They sold their property and goods, and shared the proceeds according to their individual needs” (Acts 2:43-47, cf. 4:32-5:11). Paul alludes to this activity. Wherever people meet closely on a footing of equality, sharing is inevitable.<sup>83</sup> The pooling of resources issues a call to the recovery of an economically heterogeneous church, which is fully committed to justice for the poor. For instance, a local city church as a gathering of a cross section of society can play an important role in providing role models and “connections” for inner city neighborhoods that are economically and culturally

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<sup>80</sup>Refer to Chapter One (original dissertation), 77, under the subsection on “Romans 15:26-27.” See further Sider, 92.

<sup>81</sup>See Chapter Two (original dissertation), 142, referring to table 10 and their corresponding discussion in this dissertation. See also discussions on “Collection of Funds on behalf of the Poor is a Noble Act,” “Distribution of Relief Goods is an Expression of Christian Love,” and “Wealth is to Be Shared for Use by the Needy” of this Chapter.

<sup>82</sup>Refer to Chapter One (original dissertation), 76-7, under the subsection on “Exegesis of Romans 15:26-27.”

<sup>83</sup>See Chapter One (original dissertation), 113, on the section “Summary of the Theological Concepts of Πρωχός and Πρωχία in Pauline Literature.” See also Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1911), 120, 122.

isolated. Partnership relationships between rich and poor churches would be formed with the idea of pooling resources for God's mission in the city. One practical step for churches of economic means is to, at minimum, tithe building programs and mission budgets to congregations in poor urban neighborhoods that have programs or projects in need of funding assistance.

## **Implications of the Findings**

This section enumerates the theological and practical implications of Paul's theology of *πτωχός* and *πτωχεία* to the contemporary understanding of *poor* and *poverty* among the deacons of CPBC in the province of Iloilo. These implications are important and significant to the mission and ministry of the CPBC churches. They could be mentioned in the following:

1. *There is a need for CPBC to be a model and catalyst for transformed relationships.*

As the Christian community is the salt and light of the world, Christians must set an example to the people around them. They must begin with themselves and become a model for society. But the Church is more than a model, it is an agent of transformation, a catalyst for change. The leaven of the Christian Church will leaven the whole lump of human society. The Christian message is revolutionary! It changes the lives of all who accept it in true faith. The church is the "responsible community."<sup>84</sup> The church is necessarily interested in the sufferings of humanity and it will show its concern by its actions.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Truman Douglas, *Why Go to Church* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 47.

<sup>85</sup>Franklin M. Segler, *A Theology of Church and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1960), 32.

Likewise, by their Christian ideals and convictions, the recognition of the CPBC churches as models and catalysts for transformed relationships has far-reaching practical implications for all the Christian churches in the province of Iloilo.

2. *There is a need for a mutual interdependence of the CPBC member-churches.*

Rick Warren asserts that a culture of individualism and independence must be replaced with the biblical concepts of interdependence and mutuality.<sup>86</sup> Mutual interdependence means there will be no one-sided approach. We share what we have with each other: financial resources, personnel, experiences, etc. As Rene Padilla puts it, "interdependence comes with a deeper understanding of the nature of unity in Christ and of the situation in which other members of the body of Christ live."<sup>87</sup> In God's community, there must be a mutual sharing. Padilla further points out, "Life in community cannot be conceived in terms of a situation in which one section of the church is always on the giving end while another is always on the receiving end."<sup>88</sup> We need to learn to discover other churches' gifts and resources and to share with ours and others. Similarly, CPBC churches should have an attitude of learning and accepting help

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<sup>86</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995; reprint, Manila Philippines: OMF Literature Inc., 1998), 369. A healthy world order would be marked by interdependence among nations and institutions, all blended with self-reliant independence. Peoples and nations, even in a just world, will necessarily depend upon one another, for not even the largest nation-states are completely self-sufficient. See William R. Burrows, *New Ministries: The Global Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 22.

<sup>87</sup>C. Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1985), 134.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

from one another. They must acknowledge that, in Christ, God has given gifts without partiality to all local expressions of the Body of Christ and so they need each other in order to experience the full manifestation of the Body of which Christ is the Head. Then, they all have a responsibility to exercise those gifts and to create an environment in which others can exercise theirs. They need also to respect each other in their limitations and difficulties and try to build each other up, to be sensitive to the need of the other and willing to respond to them. Finally, the “local autonomy of the congregation” as one of the Baptist distinctives should not limit or deprive the church to exercise its role or function to its four corners but go beyond them when it is deemed necessary.

In his mission, Paul set a model for mutual interdependence of the Christian Church – particularly in his raising of a collection for the Jerusalem churches. From Paul’s perspective, the Church as the Body of Christ finds its real life in togetherness and interdependence. He emphasized that all members of Christ’s body are one and interdependent with each other. By comparing the church to the human anatomy, the apostle taught that much could be done if the members share the burdens of and cooperate with each other in ministry. Paul taught that the interdependent parts within the body, the Church, needed each other. Each member had a responsibility towards the body. In essence, God wills fundamentally transformed economic relationships among his people.<sup>89</sup> These biblical precedents challenge the CPBC churches in the twenty-first century, when global inequalities become visibly larger than ever, to move toward mutual interdependence, setting a new model, as a particular denomination, for the contemporary world.

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<sup>89</sup>Ronald J. Sider, *Cry Justice! The Bible on Hunger and Poverty* (Broadway, New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), 99.

Independence in the CPBC churches and other denominations can lead to provincialism and decay unless they remember the purpose of their independence. In the words of David Bosch, “we need new relationships, mutual responsibility, accountability, and interdependence (not independence!).”<sup>90</sup>

3. *There is a need for the denomination’s theological institutions to incorporate social ministry in their respective programs.*<sup>91</sup>

One important implication derived from this study is the need for social ministry courses to be offered under CPBC institutions. The whole existence of these institutions is to teach and train people to do ministry in a way that brings people to the salvation of Jesus Christ, educates the converts, and equips the called men and women of God for ministry. Michael Scott Knight says that the offering of courses that relate to social ministry at institutions, social ministry will become more prominent within the context of the Christian community.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 466.

<sup>91</sup>There is a need for social ministry to be done in the Philippines. The poverty in the Philippines is on the rise. On a national level in the Philippines from 1993-1998, 40.6 percent of the people lived in a state of poverty. In the urban areas of the Philippines from 1993-1998, 22.2 percent of the people lived in a state of poverty, and the rural areas of the Philippines had 51.2 percent of its people lived in a state of poverty. See Michael Scott Knight, “An analysis of the Need for Social Ministry Classes at Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines,” M. Div. Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, (December 2001), 2-3.

<sup>92</sup>This would also give prominence to the theological aspects that relate to social ministry within the Biblical context. This blend of theological knowledge and understanding and the implications of this information through the application of doing social ministry would build more capable and well-rounded ministers and lay workers in the church. *Ibid.*, 87.

Christian institutions have the theological obligations not only to teach, but also to train students to do social ministry so as to give them a holistic approach in doing ministry.<sup>93</sup> One of the hindrances that prevents the churches in doing social ministry is the lack of education and training in the seminary and Bible schools.<sup>94</sup>

In addition, CPBC institutions' focus is both on the teaching and doing. Their whole existence is to teach and train students to do ministry. Knight notes, "If Christian institutions avoid or ignore the idea of teaching and training future ministers in doing social ministry effectively, then they are ignoring an avenue of ministry that is needed in these current times."<sup>95</sup>

4. *There is a need for the denomination to recognize social ministry as a viable tool for mission and evangelism, and discipleship.*

The church as the body of Christ is imbued by his Spirit and is continuing his ministry. The ministry of Jesus is the norm for the church's ministry.<sup>96</sup> Every function of the members of Christ's Body is a *διακονία* ("service"), and Christ himself is the primary holder of every *διακονία*.<sup>97</sup> Bloesch affirms that "social action is in reality the fruit and evidence of the Gospel."<sup>98</sup> The functional ministry of the church is a sort of translation of its ideal ministry into the language of on-going social activity.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 83-4.

<sup>96</sup>Franklin M. Segler, *A Theology of Church and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1960), 23.

<sup>97</sup>H. Richard Niehbur, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 31.

<sup>98</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials for Evangelical Theology: Life, Ministry, and Hope*, Vol. 2 (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978), 56.

<sup>99</sup>See Visser't Hooft and Oldham, *The Church and Its Function in Society* (Chicago: Willet, Clark and Co., 1937), 144-163.

People are all made in the image of God. Since we are created in His image, Christians should act like Him and do the things He has done. The Christian community need not only be emphatic to the plight of the poor and needy but they also need help that only the Christian community can offer them, which is the response of God through individual Christians and organizations.<sup>100</sup> They not only has the obligation to do social ministry as Christians, they also have a privilege to show the love and compassion image of God through doing acts of love and mercy in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup>

Further, Dr. E. Samson notes that both ministry to the soul and ministry to the body are integral to the church's work.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, CPBC pastors and workers are expected to model the biblical teachings and ideals not only on the spiritual dimensions but concerning social ministry as well. As Christian ministers and workers, they are also responsible to teach, to guide, and to mold their members in understanding the so-called social ministry. There is a strong mandate from God's Word regarding ministry to the total needs of persons.

Social ministry finds its basic model for integrating ministry and evangelism in how the early church interpreted the lordship of Christ.<sup>103</sup> Watkins says that

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<sup>100</sup>Knight, 81.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>See discussion on the "Significance of the Study", 12, under the "Introduction" of this dissertation. A truly holistic ministry defines evangelism and social action as functionally separate, relationally inseparable and essential to the total ministry of the church. See Tetsunao Yamamori, et al, eds., *Serving with the Poor in Asia* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1995), 133-93.

<sup>103</sup>Social ministers are always looking for opportunities to reach out and serve. When we are aware of another's need, it is our Christian responsibility to make our helping presence available in such a way that the person can receive it and use it. Our love for our neighbors should cause us to seek them out in their time of need and to make our resources available to them. See Darrel R. Watkins, *Christian Social Ministry: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 100.

many programs have earned the distrust of the community because they are used as bait for adding members to the church (e.g. “rice Christian”).<sup>104</sup> Our helping with physical, emotional, mental, and relational needs should be something we do as a matter, of course, because we are Christians.<sup>105</sup> Social ministry should not be separated from our identity and real purpose of the church, which is God’s mandate of helping people and leading people to Christ. Therefore, social ministry should be a means of CPBC churches for witnessing Jesus Christ and making disciples (not Christians) of Christ but should avoid being conditional bait of making “rice Christian”<sup>106</sup> or increasing numbers of the church.

*5. There is a need to re-educate the CPBC churches towards the validity and appropriateness of social ministry.*

Poverty is one of the biggest problems in the Philippines. In spite of the initiatives of the government to eradicate poverty since the time of President Ramos, it remains one of the biggest problems the country is facing. During the time of President Estrada, poverty incidence raised from 32 to 35 percent. The government is losing its battle against it. For example, even with its continuous efforts to eradicate street children, its number

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>106</sup>Jun Vencer concurs that when the Gospel is preached during relief, many would probably respond to the invitation to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. The risk of making “rice Christians” is there. One way to minimize the making of “rice Christians” would be not to emphasize pre-relief but post-relief evangelism. The people then would be free to attend or not to attend a Bible Study. An appropriate follow-up program yields genuine results. See Jun Vencer, *The Church and Relief* (Quezon City, Philippines: Philippine Relief and Development Services, Inc., 1990), 12.



has increased sevenfold from 223,000 in 1991 to 1.5 million in 1999.<sup>107</sup>

The church, as a community institution, needs to fill the gap left by the government in relation to social ministry. The church needs to continue doing social ministry even when the government is unable because of lack of budget. The problem is that the majority of the churches are not doing social ministry. This could be because the people are not aware of their responsibility to do social ministry as well as the lack of knowledge and skills required in doing social ministry. There needs to be more training and education in the area of social ministry to help the churches begin working with the Philippine government to help eradicate poverty. Pastors and church workers need to have a clear theology of social ministry in the light of this concern.

Knight further notes that the Church has many resources, including the social minister, gifted staff, and facilities, financial resources, and community resources.<sup>108</sup> Many of our buildings are unused during the week, and they could be used to help persons. Some churches designate the “plate offerings” to benevolence on the fifth Sunday of each quarter. Others include benevolence in the regular budget. Church can utilize educational system and hospitals and public buildings of the community for adult basic education, vocational training, and literacy training.<sup>109</sup>

*6. There is a need to offer financial assistance for the poor CPBC churches.*

The quality of life of the *poor* in Iloilo was found to be far from desirable. Their condition was characterized by

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<sup>107</sup>Knight, 80.

<sup>108</sup>Knight, 136.

<sup>109</sup>ibid.

low monthly per capita income and poor housing condition. The government welfare services in the community which would have ameliorated their living condition were inadequate if not absent. Thus, they suffered more under poverty. Factors affecting the poor quality of poor people include, low educational attainment, irregular or seasonal work, big household size with average of seven members of household, unemployment and underemployment of its members of labor force age, and daily maintenance from farming and fishing. In like manner, poor members of CPBC churches have the same situation.

At this juncture, the rich could help emancipate the oppressed, augment opportunities for the less privileged, and enhance benefits for the marginalized people of the community. They could utilize their resources to render praiseworthy service to God through various avenues conducive to members especially to the less fortunate ones. However, Little says, "Experience has taught us that all assistance must be temporary and empowering in order to avoid unhealthy dependency."<sup>110</sup> Thus, there is a need for the *poor* to view monetary collection and benevolence as a provisional means of support. Therefore, CPBC rich Christians, if possible, must witness to the importance of a caring society.<sup>111</sup>

This scenario entails the sharing of basic resources like food, water, the means of healing, and knowledge to

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<sup>110</sup>Christopher R. Little, "Whatever Happened to the Apostle Paul? An Exposition of Paul's Teaching and Practice of Giving," *Mission Frontiers* 23:3 (September 2001), 26.

<sup>111</sup>Men and women are intended to grow to maturity as members of the community, in which they learn to understand one another, to relate to one another by co-operation and shared experience, and to bear one another's burdens. See John F. Sleeman, *Economic Crisis: A Christian Perspective* (Bloomsbury Street, London: SCM Press, 1976), 76.

the *poor*. Paul enjoins everyone that to belong to one Body of Christ involves sharing of all God's gifts to us, so that there might be equality among all members (2 Cor. 8:14-15). To the extent that this standard is obeyed, dire poverty will be eliminated (Acts 2:42-47). Accordingly, the Antiochene Church took up an offering for the Jerusalem Church during a famine (Acts 11:27-30). This was clearly an act of Christian compassion, which needs to be followed today. When Christian communities suffer an overwhelming disaster that depletes their local resources, then their brethren around should be ready to offer help.

*7. There is a need to biblically practice stewardship in the CPBC churches.*

Stewardship is the commitment of life and possessions to the service of Christ. It is not primarily a method of raising money for the church but a means of developing mature Christians. To be sure, a true sense of Christian stewardship will also serve as a financial safeguard against economic problems. Its motivation is gratitude expressed in sacrificial giving to the church, regardless of the circumstances of life.<sup>112</sup> Tom Sine puts the challenge of stewardship well:

“We need to understand, if we are to be the people of God and follow Christ who identifies with the poor, it means more than giving out our leftovers. We need to move back to jubilarly stewardship models. Jubilarly stewardship is based on the assumption that ‘the earth is the Lord’s.’ If the earth is indeed the Lord’s do I get to keep in a world in which 800 million people are not able to survive. We need a whole new theology in all of our churches that understands

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<sup>112</sup>Segler, 32.

that we are part of the international body of Jesus Christ. We are called to lives of greater responsibility and greater celebration under the reign of God."<sup>113</sup>

Shubin notes that when the Church gives less than 4 percent of its income to all charitable causes, we need to ask ourselves why we invest so little in His Kingdom from those resources He has entrusted to us.<sup>114</sup> In the same fashion, given a call to be economists in God's house, CPBC churches should look to see where God's resources are not being properly distributed in the church and society, beginning with "ourselves."

*8. There is a need to create different training programs and seminars for jobless Church members.*

The CPBC should continually provide a program for members to learn a trade or special skill. Moreover, there is a need for continuing education and further training in the area of entrepreneurship and economic strategy among CPBC churches. This continuing and further enhancement of the leaders and members' skills would eventually lead to the effective administration of social services. Therefore, the creation of more regular jobs for adult members of CPBC is essential. More of these jobs should be in production rather than in services, because only the latter will eventually result in a self-sufficient family. Of course, the said proposal entails a proportionate monetary budget and other means.

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<sup>113</sup>Tom Sine, "Shifting Christian Mission into the Future Tense," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XV, No.1 (January, 1987): 152.

<sup>114</sup>Russell G. Shubin, "Where Your Treasure Is ...," *Mission Frontier* 23:3 (September 2001): 12 (10-14).

9. *There is a need to put up Preschool Program for the benefit of the poor members' children and the community.*

The province of Iloilo is characterized by many surviving and poor barangays. Since these are poor and slum areas, the literacy level is very low. These areas are characterized by a very low family income. It is striking to note that in order to augment this deficiency, mothers are forced to find job outside the home, thereby leaving the younger children behind under the care of older children in the family. As a result, the older children are deprived of further education. They are left without parental guidance and finally fall into the trap of gambling and drug addiction.<sup>115</sup>

The purpose of Preschool Program is to inculcate Christian virtues to children's minds and hearts and evidently promoting righteousness for our nation seeking favor before God and man. Second, to develop Christian leaders for our community and for our nation as a whole. Third, to reach and teach children positive Christian values. Fourth, to teach children the Christian way of life while they are young and molding is easy (Prov. 22:6). Fifth, to extend quality Christian education to poor families who cannot afford to send their children to private schools. As a result, this will lower the possibilities of mothers seeking jobs outside the home. The presence of mothers in the home will afford the necessary parental guidance that children badly need.<sup>116</sup>

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Given this situation, it is obvious that the solution to the problem of poverty requires a holistic integrative approach. It is evident that the conditions within which we

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<sup>115</sup>May K. Huelar, *Feasibility Study: Jesus Christ is Lord Learning Center*, (Iloilo City, 1982), 2-4.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*

find poor people in especially difficult circumstances are varied and complex. Having known the specific factors and manifestations of poverty, which affect the poor, the researcher suggests the following recommendations for further study and actions that may aid in the proper and effective exercise of Church ministry to the *poor*. These recommendations are as follows.

1. The churches should be educated and equipped concerning the issues of poverty and struggles of the *poor* through regular seminars, workshop and literature.
2. There is a need to manifest visible and transparent Christian witness in the proper exercise of church funds particularly for the *poor*.
3. There is a need to improve the procedure and the practice of Christian giving and stewardship among the churches.
4. There should be a united effort, with a sense of accountability, to be made at the denominational level to address the issues and the problems of the *poor* and *poverty*.
5. The Church should adopt the apostolic model of *διακονία* ("service"), which reflects sacrificial attitudes and a caring community.
6. The church should discover and exercise the neglected incarnational gifts – sharing, caring and giving (cf. Rom. 12:8-9).
7. The adoption of a deprived community by a rich local church to serve as a catalyst.
8. The churches should practice the stewardship of the earth's resources.
9. A simple life-style of the members of the Body of Christ.
10. The churches should show solidarity with the *poor* in every way and participate in their struggles against injustice.
11. An additional study needs to be conducted in relation to how churches participate in the social ministry aspects.
12. There should be solidarity among Christian congregations in the issue of poverty and injustice.

# ON ANCIENT MYTHS, RELIGION AND MODERNITY *WITH FOCUS ON THE FILIPINO*<sup>1</sup>

Mona Lisa P. Siacor

## Introduction

### A. Significance of the Study

Man is more than the sum of his parts. There is no single comprehensive definition of what he is. All definitions that exist are relative to a particular thought frame. Thus for Aristotle he is a political animal, “that animal which lives in a *polis* or city-state.”<sup>2</sup> For the taxonomist he is a *Homo sapiens sapiens*, modern man. For the Priestly writer, “They will be masters over all life – the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals.”<sup>3</sup>

Today of the 6,396 million<sup>4</sup> human beings existing on Earth, the uncontested immediate concern, as it always has been, is the involuntary act of keeping the physical body functioning. In the biologist’s jargon, it is the “maintenance of internal metabolism.” Yet this most

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<sup>1</sup> A Research Paper submitted to the Institute for Advanced Theological Studies (IATS) in 2005.

<sup>2</sup> P. Bock, *Modern Cultural Anthropology: An Introduction*, 1969, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26b, New Living Translation.

<sup>4</sup> C. Haub: demographer, *2004 World Data Sheet*, data as of mid-2004.

scientifically precise characterization between living and inanimate objects is barely enough to answer the most profound of questions, "What is life?"

The study of ancient myths, religion and modernity starts off with the thought frame that a human being is "more than" an aggregate of energy-consuming macromolecules.<sup>5</sup> It is saying that a human being's existence has with it the dimensions presently labeled as biological, emotional, moral, spiritual, and social. This list may not be comprehensive, nor are they intended here to be in a particularly strict ordering. The fact is that *anthropology*, "the study of man," systematically takes into consideration all these labels, and more, in an attempt to have a comprehensive description of what a human being is.

Anthropology today, as a systematic study, uses among its bases that ever-controversial scientific theory of evolution. The qualifier *scientific* here is very important as it puts across the fact that this *theory* is not a *hypothesis*. That is, it has graduated from just being a *probable explanation*<sup>6</sup> into an explanation that no one today has presented substantial dispute against, as in a way as systematized as this field of study has become. Thus, *science* being "a way of looking at the world"<sup>7</sup> is just as legitimate as any other way, as far as looking at the *world* is concerned, where *world* includes the human beings. A defense for anthropology is not in warrant here, or for the theory of evolution either. The fact is that it is impossible to deal with the ideas of ancient myths, religion and modernity with relative objectivity unless the findings of anthropology are considered acceptable. To go about the question on what life is has been recognized to be within the domain of ancient myths and religion.

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<sup>5</sup> That is, the aggregates of molecules that makes up tissues and organs.

<sup>6</sup> One that generally needs 'intensive' testing yet.

<sup>7</sup> L. Nash, *The Nature of Natural Science*, 1963, 3.



“Modernity” within history is generally agreed to start with the Renaissance. It was then “the discovery of the world and of man.”<sup>8</sup> It was the start of the time of fast changes, the end of which, if there is one, is yet very much out of sight. Man today keeps on generating discoveries, and many value systems have evolved along with these discoveries. Not least is the undermining of long held traditional beliefs, with the simple reason that they are not rational.

As seen in the shocking amount of publications everyday in the entire world, it seems as if man keeps on finding new things to talk about, new things to explore. On what do all his explorations revolve around? On him, of course. He is both the subject and the object of these explorations. He creates the bomb and the concentration camp, and he is the victim of both. He generates actions, and the repercussion is that he has to react to the reactions. For it seems that man can only create what’s tangible, and to the likewise tangible reactions – to the grazed city and to the desecrated bodies – there are intangible reactions that can only be pinpointed as being generated from “within” him, in his psyche perhaps.

The poet Alexander Pope wrote, “Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; the proper study of mankind is man.” Without being too overly ambitious, I think it is worthwhile endeavor for humankind to try to understand himself. The Wisdom Literature writers of the Bible precisely have this objective in mind. Ecclesiastes and Job with their probing statements and questions are excellent examples. “While myths are neither reliable history nor science, they may have important things to say; their subject matter revolves around the deep and abiding concerns of human origins and destinies. In short, myth focuses on our position in the cosmos and

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<sup>8</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 23, *Renaissance*, 380. As the French historian Jules Michelet put it.

our understanding of who and what we are.”<sup>9</sup> The same can be said of religion.

With the looking at ancient myths, religion and modernity, it is hoped it can be made plain that man looks at the world “rationally “ as well as “nonrationally,” just as he is an integral whole of different components. Anthropologist Franz Boas said, “... even in our civilization, popular thought is primarily directed by emotion, not by reason; and that the reasoning injected into emotionally determined behavior depends upon a variety of conditions and is, therefore, in course of time, variable.”<sup>10</sup> Hence it is clear that man cannot especially boast of the superiority of rationality, as he himself does not subscribe to it first hand.

The contention between reason and intuition has invaded Christian theology, most notably during the Reformation, which was contemporaneous with the Renaissance. It is a point of interest for believers of the Christian faith to understand the extent of threat modernity poses for it. The foundation of this belief system belongs to the ancient era, and the literary expression of it, the Bible, has been said to be couched in mythical language. As such, its relevance to modern day society, as well as the belief system it espouses, is being extensively explored. A better understanding of the interplay between myth, religion, and modernity may enable us to have a clear reckoning as to where we are situated with regards to our perspectives. This, hopefully, will equip us more in our hopes to have continuous fruitful dialogue with other faiths and ideologies towards the *shalom*, or the kingdom of God, that we look forward to.

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<sup>9</sup> R. Schmidt, *Exploring Religion*, 1980, 128.

<sup>10</sup> F. Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, revised ed, 1963, 210.

## B. Statement of the Problem

Again in our study of myths and religion, we come to an avenue of an overwhelming amount of generated literature. These span almost the entire history of literary man, most certainly including the oral precursors. Since the obvious purpose of language is communication, then it would not be difficult to find support for the idea that man's earliest conversations are for self-expression vis-à-vis for his survival. Since then his self-expressions have found other objects, but still basically centered on survival. Of these self-expressions in the ancient world, the most prominent belong to the domain of myths, which are incorporated into people's beliefs and practices.

Many beliefs and practices around the world today are labeled as superstitious, which is "resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation."<sup>11</sup> This is a mouthful of description pointing to bodies of belief formations that have not passed through the rigors of scientific testing. Such are myths and religion. Having in mind therefore this shift of man's existence from the pre-scientific to the scientific now, it is interesting to put forth whether "modern man" today lives within value systems that have bearing with those held by the not yet "modern." Has the ardor of modernity done away with myths? What place does religion have in a technological society? Are these unscientific perspectives still with us and are as strong in influence as ever? To what extent do the concepts of myth and modernity threaten the Biblical form of expression?

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<sup>11</sup> Merriam Webster, Inc., *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary: Private Library Edition*, 1986.

## C. Objectives

Ancient myths, religion and modernity spoken within the context of sociology and anthropology will primarily disable the inclusion of the Christian tenets within the preliminary discussions. This inclusion will be done on the Reflection part at the end, as I feel appropriate.

This paper will prominently feature the Filipino. He lives in the twenty-first century of the Common Era and has undergone about four hundred years of relatively abrupt cultural movements. No better justification can be given in choosing this special point of focus other than as one of them. This should help in the understanding of my society better, be a small contribution to my countrymen's concerted efforts at trying to understand our non-monotonous national psyche, and from thus be active participants in the taking care of humanity and of the world. God has appointed us as stewards of His creation.

The Filipino makes a fascinating subject in that he is a manifestation of the meeting of the so-called East and West, and of the so-called primitive and modern. This paper will try to present characteristics of the Filipino that qualify him as mentioned. In so doing, his belief system will be looked at, hence, the focus will be made on his religion and mythology. Thus, in attempting to describe modern man, especially the modern Filipino, from a particular perspective, it is hoped here that a picture will be presented on where he gets his beliefs from and the strength of the influence these beliefs have on him as he moves on toward the future.

In presenting the Filipino in this light, attention will be drawn on the fact that there is no reason at all to consider his heritage inferior to any other people, whether from the anthropological sense or from Christianity's perception.

## **D. Scope and Limitation of the Study**

Any of these three areas: ancient myths, religion, and modernity, is by itself a broad subject. The quantity of materials on each of these is gargantuan. This paper is more of a synthesis of readings than a study. It tries to put together into one picture the connectedness between the three named areas. The general descriptions therefore are neither exhaustive nor in-depth. The description of the Filipino against these backgrounds is taken from monographs authored mostly by prominent Filipino sociologists. Therefore, this is a humble attempt to bridge a gap between the infrequently accessed works and the theology student.

At the last part, the Reflection, is where features of the natural world are sometimes cited as “parallel expressions” of some ideas couched in Biblical language.

## **Discussion**

### **A. Ancient Myths**

To someone who has not gone into the nuances of the term *myth* what comes to mind at the mention of it is the mythology of the Greeks. Thus, superficially, it is about gods and goddesses and their affairs, and the origins of certain things or phenomena in nature. The word *myth* is also used as a jargon in the context of *something popularly believed* but has in fact been found out not to be true, either partly or entirely. For instance, “boys are smarter than girls in mathematics.” There are such myths in our societies that denouncing them seems to be one of the triumphs of science.

Although science<sup>12</sup> and myths cannot come together, it does not necessarily imply that myths connote falsity. On the contrary, myths reflect “the experience of the sacred and hence implies the notion of *being*, of *meaning*, and of *truth*.”<sup>13</sup> Mercado said, “It is the truth of experience, of the real, of life, of the holy, of the sacred.”<sup>14</sup> Thus although myths seem to sound just like stories, they in fact tell of sacred beliefs.

*Myth* is from the Greek word *mythos*, meaning, “that which is spoken.” Myths are “stories told as symbols of fundamental truths within societies having a strong oral tradition.”<sup>15</sup> Roger Schmidt says of myth as a “tale or story...dealing with cosmic and exemplary time”; the subject matter of which is “primeval origins, ancestral models, and paradigmatic lives, or expectations about the future and the end of time.”<sup>16</sup>

As one opens for the first time an encyclopedia on myths of the world, one would surely be amazed of the richness in diversity and the complexity of the plots. What should not come as surprising is the presence of common human aspirations, emotions, and desires, though in different contexts, and usually in fantastic settings. It has been said, “Myths are attempts to give significance to any situation that man has considered important.”<sup>17</sup> Students of mythology have been able to present generalized classifications of myths because, amazingly, common themes occur among the diverse cultures of the world despite their vast geographical

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<sup>12</sup> Science as that way of investigating knowledge in procedures that are reproducible, and that which involves observation of physical properties.

<sup>13</sup> M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, Volume 1, 1978, Preface.

<sup>14</sup> F. R. Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols: Philippines*, revised ed, 1990, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana, Mythology*, vol. 19, 699.

<sup>16</sup> R. Schmidt, 1980, 126.

<sup>17</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana, Mythology*, vol. 19, 700.

distances and differences in histories. One instance is the world-flood theme that can be found in the mythologies of Ireland, Greece, Egypt, Persia, India, Indo-China, Korea, Siberia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Melanesia, Polynesia, Australia, North American Indians, South American Indians, Latin America, and Africa.<sup>18</sup>

Classifications of Myth<sup>19</sup>:

1. Cosmological myths, which is concerned with the creation of the cosmos;
2. Life-crisis myths, which is concerned with crucial events in the human life such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death;
3. Hunting and agricultural myths, which is concerned with animals, the hunt, planting and harvesting;
4. and myths about extraordinary individuals.

Myths have also been thought of in terms of these “theories”<sup>20</sup>:

1. Rational myth theory, which states that myths were created to explain natural events and forces happening in nature;
2. Functional myth theory, which says that there are those that were created as a type of social control, to teach morality and social behavior;
3. Structural myth theory, which says that myths were patterned after human mind and human nature;

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<sup>18</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Myths and Culture*, 2003, 135-6.

<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana, Mythology*, vol. 19, 700.

<sup>20</sup> Digital Papers. November 2004.

[http://www.digitaltermpapers.com/view.php?url=/Mythology/4\\_myth\\_theories.shtml](http://www.digitaltermpapers.com/view.php?url=/Mythology/4_myth_theories.shtml)

4. Psychological myth theory, which says that myths are based on human emotion.

On the other hand, it can be said that anthropologists and sociologists do handle beliefs in the sacred with the aid of science in the sense of systematized investigation. The names Emile Durkheim, Claude-Lévi Strauss and Mircea Eliade along with many others appear again and again on such discourses. They have extensively organized concepts on the field so that their works have become indispensable references for those interested in these topics. Durkheim was one of the earliest proponents of sociology as a science. It was him who put together a series of “model” steps for use to systematically study a particular sociological issue. These are the very same steps still used today in sociological research: defining the problem, reviewing literature, forming a hypothesis, choosing a research design, collecting data, analyzing data, and drawing conclusion.<sup>21</sup> For Durkheim, the word *sacred* in a particular community is, that which is set apart from everyday experience and inspires awe and reverence.<sup>22</sup> What is sacred to a person may not be to another. It may be the forest, or the deities, the spirits, the supernatural forces, or even moral principles. Usually there are rituals that may be done to exert influence over several of these objects, since the underlying belief was that “we are fashioned by external forces beyond our control.”<sup>23</sup> Eliade and Levi-Strauss may represent the spectrum of interpretations of what myths signify. Levi-Strauss treated myths from the standpoint of “what is local and particular to a given society,” whereas with Eliade, “to general human

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<sup>21</sup> D. Light et al, *Sociology*, fifth ed., 1989, 29.

<sup>22</sup> D. Light, 1989, 517. So that an object that is not *sacred* is *profane*.

<sup>23</sup> D. Light, 1989, 518.



religious interests and as far as possible divorce it from the local and particular.”<sup>24</sup>

To speak of myths is to speak of something ancient. Cornelius Van Peursen suggested three stages in the development of human thought, reflecting three ways of understanding reality.<sup>25</sup> The first stage of which is “The period of myth, where man and reality, subject and object, were linked together. This was not yet part of time, not yet part of history.” Giambattista Vico spoke of the period of *the age of the gods* at the beginnings of civilization. He said this when *families’ lives centered around religion, marriage, and the burial of the dead.*<sup>26</sup> But how ancient is ancient? And when were the beginnings of civilization?

Books tell us of the Paleolithic era as the earliest in human memory. The beginnings of which is not recorded of course, but it is supposed to have ended sometime 9,000 B.C. That’s about 11,000 years ago. The Paleanthropean<sup>27</sup> was a hunter (man) and a food gatherer (woman). There are burial sites thought to be as old as 70,000 years. Analysts have concluded that this practice point to the belief in the afterlife. Cave paintings of animals and the hunt in the Eurasian continent are estimated to be as old as 52,000 years. Their motifs and inaccessibility indicate an ideological system that Leroi-Gourhan has called “the religion of the caves.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Myth, vol. 4, 437.

<sup>25</sup> R. Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting: A Case in the Contextualization of Theology*, 1981, 117.

<sup>26</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Myth, vol. 4, 435. The other ages being the “age of heroes” with the rise of the aristocratic states, and the “age of men” of the democratic republics. This is according to G. Vico’s theory of history.

<sup>27</sup> M. Eliade, 1978, Preface.

<sup>28</sup> M. Eliade, 1978, 17. Rodney Stark writes also: “However there can be no doubt that our Neanderthal ancestors had religion at least 100,000 years ago, because evidence of their faith has been unearthed. The Neanderthal buried their dead with great care and provided them with gifts and food for use in the next world. And deep

The hunters and gatherers had to work around the conditions of their environment. They would have attributed human characteristics to objects around them, not having a systematized knowledge yet of the differences between themselves and the mountains, the rocks, plants, animals, the weather, seasons, etcetera. Their belief was *animistic*.<sup>29</sup> They may not have the concept of the *spirit* but they believed all the same that whatever humans have that animates them, all other things around them must have this also. Perhaps they understood that everything is basically interrelated.

Georges Dumézil said that the function of myths is “to express dramatically the ideology under which a society lives; not only to hold out to its conscience the values it recognizes and the ideals it pursues from generation to generation, but above all to express its very being and structure, the elements, the connections, the balances, the tensions that constitute it; to justify the rules and traditional practices without which everything within a society would disintegrate.”<sup>30</sup> Unlike fairy tales and legends, myths are understood to be true stories within their own societies. It is only from the point of view of outsiders, and of the advent of rationalism, that they have become to connote as stories that are not true. The concerns of myth as enumerated above are also concerns of religion, and it has been established that “the

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in their caves, the Neanderthal built small altars out of bear bones. These relics make it clear that the Neanderthal believed in life after death and conducted ceremonies to seek the aid of supernatural beings.” R. Stark, *Sociology*, 1989, 404.

<sup>29</sup> Schmidt defines animism as “a sense that the world is filled with personal spirits. Animals, plants, and other natural phenomena, such as, sun, moon, rivers, mountains, and fire, are spirit beings endowed with qualities of the human spirit – thinking, intending, feeling, hearing.” 357.

<sup>30</sup> G. Dumézil, *Destiny of the Warrior*, translated by A. Hildebeitel, 1969, 3.

line between them is often very thin.”<sup>31</sup> Religions are not tales or stories; religion uses stories. Myths are found within almost any religion.<sup>32</sup>

The question on how myths have come about has generated many answers, which are debatable. Freud suggested that myths are “distorted vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations, the secular dreams of youthful humanity.” Euripides before him was on similar lines of thinking. Jung suggested the concept of the “collective unconsciousness,” that within man is a “second psychic system of collective, universal and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconsciousness does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become consciousness secondarily, and which give definite form to certain psychic contents.”<sup>33</sup>

However myths have risen, whether from a single locality and spread, or independently among separate peoples, the fact remains that it is in the sense of the universality of these myths that bring home to us the unity of man. This idea is parallel to the scientific fact that the biological composition of human beings around the world is one.

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<sup>31</sup> A. Mercatante, *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of World Mythology and Legend*, 1988, Author’s Preface.

<sup>32</sup> Schmidt fits myths within that dimension of religious expression he called the conceptual category; the other categories being ritualistic, personal, and social. Preface xii.

<sup>33</sup> A. Mercatante, 1988, Introduction.

## B. The Filipino Is A Cosmopolitan

The Filipino is Negroid, Mongoloid, and Caucasoid<sup>34</sup>, and everything else in between. That is, he<sup>35</sup> is predominantly Malay with strains of Chinese, Indian, and Spanish blood, and for some, of the Negrito, the American, the Japanese, the Egyptian, and any of the European blood, etcetera. While it is difficult to describe the typical Filipino's physical features, if indeed there is one, many books present lists of character traits that are supposedly inherent and collectively unique to him. A list will most likely appear as follows.

The Filipino:

1. has the propensity for gambling;
2. is inveterately extravagant;
3. is fatalistic in his outlook in life;
4. tends to lack discipline and perseverance;
5. is proverbially hospitable;
6. has close family ties;
7. has a high sense of gratitude to those who have shown him favors;
8. is cooperative;
9. is among the bravest peoples on earth;
10. is passionately romantic and artistic;
11. is highly intelligent;
12. is adaptable, enduring, and resilient;
13. has a deep spiritual yearning and gift of faith.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana Centennial Edition*. vol. 23, 121. It must be noted, however, that *human "racial" classifications contain little genetic information, and from a biological standpoint, must be done away with*. The 'racial classifications' used here is for the purpose of a description based on external physical appearance, and no discrimination of whatever sort is implied.

<sup>35</sup> The use of *he* throughout is inclusive of everyone in the context, and therefore is not finicky about labels. There is only one Filipino equivalent to the third person *he* or *she*; it is *siya*, which is exactly how I think of the rendition *he*.

<sup>36</sup> S. M. Zaide, *The Philippines: A Unique Nation* With Gregorio F. Zaide's *History of the Republic of the Philippines*, second ed, 1999, 22-4.

Sweeping as the list sounds, nevertheless it is one that has been heard over and over again inside elementary and high school classrooms so much so that I for one, as a product of these classrooms, have only belatedly stopped on my tracks and thought of this question, “What is a Filipino?”

In elementary and high school classes the most popular reckoning of the earliest entry of the Filipino aborigines to this 7,107-island archipelago is about 30,000 years ago<sup>37</sup>, when ancestors of the modern-day Negritos were supposed to have traversed island bridges that were exposed during the last Ice Age<sup>38</sup>, when much of the oceans’ waters were frozen near the polar regions. Then the Malays were supposed to have come next on rafts or canoes, called *barangays* or *balanghais*; then the Chinese and the Arabs in their merchant ships; and then the colonizers – Spanish, Americans, Japanese. Now it is not even needed for people to come to us for their influences to be felt. They are only a television button or a convenience store away.

Renato Constantino wrote an amusing article *The Filipinos in the Philippines* in the Manila Chronicle on October 4, 1959, hard-hitting the reality of who the Filipino is. He is “Brown and White; Blacks, Reds and Yellows; the largest minority group in the Philippines. The present native inhabitants are the survivors of that race which suffered the brutalization of the Spaniards, the

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<sup>37</sup> E. P. Patanñe, *The Philippines in the World of Southeast Asia: A Cultural History*, 1972, 81. Patanñe cites Beyer in stating this date. Even before the coming of these people there is archeological evidence that human beings were already found in parts of the archipelago. Speaking of the archeological find in the Cagayan Valley in 1971, “The tools of paleolithic workmanship and the fossilized bones were dated 150,000 years ago, a date which now definitely establishes the presence of early man in the Philippines.”

<sup>38</sup> E. P. Patanñe, 1972, 98. This account has been challenged, though.

“extermination campaign” of the American troops during the Filipino-American War, and the mass executions of the Japanese.”<sup>39</sup> The minority bit is even more true now, almost half a decade later, as more and more South Koreans and other nationalities flock to our schools and perform in our business sectors, as well as enriching our religious arena with their missionary endeavors.

On the other hand, the Filipino is also among the minorities outside the Philippines. In 1998 there were 755,684 Filipino overseas contract workers found in more than 100 countries, mostly working in the Middle East, followed closely by others employed in neighboring Asian nations, followed distantly by the European Union and then the United States.<sup>40</sup> Today there are already 8 million of them, and the government says 1 million more will be heading in that direction this year. It was quoted that the Philippines is “the largest source of migrant labor in the world.”<sup>41</sup> Many of these overseas contract workers come from rural areas. It is inevitable that their families back home will be affected also by the foreign influences they are exposed to. The Filipino therefore, whether in the fast paced cities or in the rural areas, lives in a constantly evolving way of life that will only lead him, just as it had done in the past, to a lifestyle consequently affected by whatever current major factor toward his survival. As for today it has to be monetary provisions, for the family’s food, for the children’s education, for eventual retirement’s savings.

He is everywhere. He is a cosmopolitan. In his centers of activities, in his cities, he lives in a society that has done its best to cater to the caprices of two major

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<sup>39</sup> R. Constantino, *Neocolonial Identity And Counter-Consciousness: Essays on Cultural Decolonization*, edited with an introduction by István Mészáros, 1978, 95-6.

<sup>40</sup> P. Rodell, *Culture and Customs of the Philippines*, Hanchao Lu: Series Editor, 2002, 208.

<sup>41</sup> *Newsweek*, Vol. CXLIV, No. 14, October 4, 2004, G. Wehrfritz and M. Vitug, article: *Workers For the World*.

powers of the day: materialism and consumerism. His roadside billboards advertise merchandize of international renown. It is even said that he prefers these foreign things to those of his industry. Yet the Filipino has retained his brand of distinction so much so that “the visitor who stays for more than a brief visit soon discovers that even Western foods do not taste quite like they do back home, and that Filipinos really prefer their own foods to imported dishes.<sup>42</sup> Soon, this comfortable Westernized Asian country becomes remarkably odd and difficult to understand in fundamental ways. Just as I have belatedly realized myself, the complexity of being a Filipino will elude a boxed simplification for a long time to come.

### **C. The Filipino Is Religious**

Filipino as a cosmopolitan reflects the movements of the innovative cities of the world. Cable television, mobile cellular phones and main-street Internet stations are sine qua nons of many of his major cities. He has commercial districts patterned after those found in the First World. Shoes, fabric and fashion are highly regarded exports, just as his cinema has decades ago reached a standard comparable to the best in the world’s film industry.<sup>43</sup> He is mentor to many of his Asian neighbors in the speaking of the English language. Yet this upbeat veneer is only a show to present to the world that the Filipino does not quail from the strange and the new. This propensity of the Filipino to adapt himself to the strange and the new must have been with him for a long time now. This is the

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<sup>42</sup> P. Rodell, 2002, 1-2.

<sup>43</sup> Lino Brocka was praised at the Cannes Film Festival in 1976. His films were prominently featured in a 1998 film festival at the Lincoln Center in New York. Also in 1998 Marilou Diaz-Abaya’s *Sa Pusod ng Dagat* was shown at the Berlin Film Festival before going on an international tour.

natural consequence of having to live on the crossroads – as where the Philippines is geographically, among island groups at the edges of a continent and of a vast ocean – where people of differing ways of life will have to pass by at one time or another. Each agent of the strange and the new must have had transforming effects on the “natives,” depending on either the degree of non-hostility shown or the length of time the strangeness was synonymous with power.

Adaptability is, indeed, a rule of life. The human body has an internal maintenance system, which in the process called *homeostasis*, ensures the normality of its organs’ functions all throughout outside conditional changes. For the Filipino amidst the strange and the new, it is his religiosity that ensures his propensity to adapt.

The Filipino’s religiosity is a foregone conclusion.<sup>44</sup> If it is not enough to point out that almost everyone in the Philippines “has” a religion, that is, that atheism has never become a trend, then it must be pointed out that the Filipino is an Asian, and that for the world to be an Asian is to be with a strong sense of the spiritual. All the major religions of the world – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism – came from Asia. For the Filipino, it is his religiosity that is his homeostasis. Yet for him religion is not just a tool to be used for the benefit of his psyche, but is also the arena on which he moves about in his daily dealings.

Filipinos can either be a Roman Catholic, a Protestant, an Iglesia Ni Cristo, an Aglipayan, a Muslim, a Buddhist, or a believer of other religious classification, which were introduced recently. Filipino are religious, but not strict conformist to their brand of religion. What is

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<sup>44</sup> “Three international surveys have shown that the Filipinos are among the most religious people on earth.” *Roots of Filipino Spirituality*. T. B. Obusan, editor, 1998, 241. Furthermore, there has been no strong movement toward the proving of the existence of God, much as the West has been doing for centuries now. God’s existence is an unquestioned fact for the Filipino.



inherent among Filipinos is their strong sense of the numinous.<sup>45</sup> All authors I have come across with on this topic agree on this observation. Author Chester L. Hunt sums it up and very neatly described this religiosity. He wrote, "Religion holds a central place in the life of most Filipinos, including Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, Protestants, and animists. It is central not as an abstract belief system, but rather as a host of experiences, rituals, ceremonies, and adjurations that provide continuity in life, cohesion in the community, and moral purpose for existence."<sup>46</sup>

For the Filipino, religion is inseparable from his daily acts of existence. Emmanuel Lantin concluded that, "Participation in these colorful community celebrations afforded the common folk with a religious "feeling for the supernatural" and a sense of communal belonging, thereby satisfying the most fundamental need of man for a dialogical encounter."<sup>47</sup> This is also in agreement with Leonardo N. Mercado when he said, "For the Filipino, the sacred and the profane are intertwined ... Both the profane and the sacred are so blended that some anthropologists do not know where to draw the line between the social and the religious."<sup>48</sup>

Man's religion cannot be discussed in terms of the origin of its being since it is among the assumptions of being human. Mircea Eliade says, "... the "sacred" is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness. On the most archaic levels of culture, *living, considered as being human*, is in itself a *religious act*, for food-getting, sexual life, and work have a sacramental value. In other words,

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<sup>45</sup> The numinous is the "nonrational or nonordinary quality of the sacred." Schmidt, 361.

<sup>46</sup> R. E. Dolan: editor, *Philippines: A Country Study* (Area Handbook Series). 4<sup>th</sup> ed, 1993, 98.

<sup>47</sup> J. A. Belita: editor, and *GOD said: HALA!: Studies in Popular Religiosity in the Philippines*, 1991, 184.

<sup>48</sup> L. N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 1975, 25.

to be – or, rather, to become – a *man* signifies “religion”.<sup>49</sup> To be human means to have religion, or to be religious.

Six of the nine characteristic features of religion enumerated in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* touch directly on the sacred: beliefs in, and rituals focused on, the supernatural; a contrast between the sacred and the profane; a gods-sanctioned morality; feelings of awe towards all these; and some form of communication. Of the three left, two touch on the individual’s concerns: of where the individual fits in all these, and on acting correspondingly. The ninth speaks of the function of religion in binding together persons into one social group.<sup>50</sup> Though it has been said that,

“Religion is the not the only way to give meaning to life, but it does represent an ambitious attempt to give the universe significance. In this respect, the fundamental religious posture, whether it embraces or flees from the physical world, is at its core affirmative. Religion affirms that the cosmos has meaning; human life is ultimately significant.”<sup>51</sup>

Religion, then, can be defined as

“any person’s reliance upon a pivotal value in which that person finds essential wholeness as an individual and as a person-in-community. For that person all other values are subordinate to this central value, which is authentic to the individual and his community though it may not be meaningful to others.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> M. Eliade, 1978, Preface.

<sup>50</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Religion, vol. 7, 141.

<sup>51</sup> Schmidt, 9-10.

<sup>52</sup> R. C. Monk et al, *Exploring Religious Meaning*, third ed, 1987, 4–12.

## D. The Filipino Lives In His Myths

The discussion has come this far with the bearing that of the 83.7 million<sup>53</sup> Filipinos today, more than 80% are Roman Catholics. More than two decades ago, the anthropologist F. Landa Jocano did research and wrote a book on religion and religious change in the Philippines. On his Preface appeared the thesis of the monograph:

The indigenous religion appears to maintain its fundamental structures and characteristics since the Spanish contact while the introduced religion (Christianity) has been tremendously modified to suit local ways of thinking, believing and doing things. Many cultural communities still practice similar religious rituals and ceremonies as recorded four centuries ago. The traditional magico-religious rituals and beliefs have remained intact and have continued to form part of ritual lifeways. In contrast, Christian doctrines, outside the portals of churches and cathedrals, have been dramatically indigenized such that what evolved is the popular version of Christian belief system which we call folk Christianity.<sup>54</sup>

As vital to Jocano's discussions he enumerated and described about a hundred gods, goddesses, and beliefs of the pre-colonial Philippines all throughout the Luzon, the Visayas, and the Mindanao regions. Predominant among these beliefs were the beliefs in the afterlife, the domain of which was "divided into layers" that were inhabited by powerful spirits, some good, some evil, many of which were involved in human affairs. The contact with Roman Catholicism caused the discredit and loss from memory of these spirits from the daily affairs.

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<sup>53</sup> C. Haub, data as of mid-2004.

<sup>54</sup> F. L. Jocano, *Folk Christianity: A Preliminary Study of Conversion and Patterning of Christian Experience in the Philippines* (Monograph Series No. 1), 1981, iii.

Of whichever was left in the memory, the *engkanto* is the generic name applied to their kind. Jocano mentioned *Bathala* or *Abba* as the Tagalog's chief deity, creator of all things, living in the *kaluwalhatian*, or sky. The gods and goddesses were mostly nature deities, guardians or bestowers of specific phenomena and objects of the environment – of crops, winds, hunters, pregnant women, war, language, families, hillsides, mountains, feasts, households, sickness, lovers, lost things, rain, etcetera. Underlying the different powers attributed to these spirits was the Filipino's belief that, "Man enjoyed good luck for as long as he had the favors of the gods; he suffered from misfortunes if such favors were removed."<sup>55</sup> It was in this context of good luck and misfortune, depending on the spirits, that Roman Catholicism entered the Philippines.

Folk Protestantism is also a reality. Evangelical Rodney L. Henry writes, "So at the level of ultimate concerns, folk Catholicism and folk Protestantism share the same similarities and differences which exist between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. At the animistic level, folk Catholicism and folk Protestantism differ in their external practices but share virtually the same spirit worldview."<sup>56</sup>

It is curious to note that 1521 and 1565, the years Spaniards first came and returned to the Philippines, was just about the beginning of the European Renaissance. The expeditionists Magellan and Legaspi had just come from what the humanists called the Dark Ages, the Medieval. It was a Medieval Christianity that first came to the Philippines, which was among the ways of thinking that have not yet undergone "enlightenment," implying that it was a belief system that has not put into the forefront "the dignity of man." It was this that a fear-ridden

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<sup>55</sup> F. L. Jocano, 1981, 16.

<sup>56</sup> R. L. Henry, *Filipino Spirit World: A Challenge to the Church*, 1986, 16.

and obedience-oriented faith came to a people already deep in a culture of reward and retribution.

The student of theology will find it easy to appreciate what a crucial event this introduction of a new belief system was. Thought patterns of the foreign missionaries and of the mission field were not the same. The differing languages did not allow the clearest communication, most especially of the abstract ideas. Gray areas remained, since already for the Filipino, the sense of the spiritual was very much part of his life. Thus "Christianity and Islam have been superimposed on ancient traditions and acculturated."<sup>57</sup>

Jaime A. Belita noted that the word *hala* is derived from the word *Allah*. It is not incongruous therefore that *hala!* is the Filipino's popular expletive for almost anything at all that has gone awry, as if something has been grossly violated. It is spoken to truant children, of burnt rice, of broken china, of unceasing torrents of rain, to misbehaving adults. *Hala!* is actually "a word of warning about the dire consequences he will encounter for having alienated the spirits, believed to be the sources of well-being."<sup>58</sup>

The reason why the Filipino's myths were played down against the popular religious belief systems is very easy. Her Spanish and American colonizers came with the assumption, and the intent to make clear to her, that whatever she had was inferior. I think this is also the reason why one can hardly find a consistent classification of the Filipino myths in my university library. Even their

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<sup>57</sup> P. Rodell, 2002, 98. Again on page 106, "Muslim in the Philippines has absorbed indigenous elements, much as has Catholicism. [They] make offerings to spirits (diwatas), malevolent or benign, believing that such spirits can and will have an effect on one's health, family, and crops. They also include pre-Islamic customs in ceremonies making rites of passage – birth, marriage, and death ... they share the essentials of Islam, but specific properties vary from one group to another."

<sup>58</sup> J. A. Belita, 1991, Introduction.

worth as literary genre has been devaluated and neglected. If there exists such a classification among experts then it certainly is not yet in wide circulation. Usually what is there is a collection of folktales and legends, where the myths are thrown in among them as though they're of the same level of consideration.<sup>59</sup>

In one of his more comprehensive books on myths, F. Demetrio,<sup>60</sup> after the preliminaries, starts off with an account of the pre-colonial Filipino's beliefs involving the sky. In his wonder of its inaccessibility, despite appearing near as touching the earth in the horizon, the Filipino articulated accounts of this perception of the connectedness of earth and sky.<sup>61</sup> These accounts speak of the Filipino's origin and destination ("first people", "to pick up the rest of the men") and of his utmost concerns ("life and death"). F. Demetrio ends this chapter with a question that implies that the Filipino's strong belief in the Christian God or in the Muslim Allah, who is of "heaven," is strongly connected to the ancient belief of the necessity of the sky to his existence.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Folktales were obviously invented and are told for entertainment; legends are not necessarily believed in as true but are supposed to happen in historical times. A. Mercatante, 1988, Author's Preface.

<sup>60</sup> In F. R. Demetrio, 1990.

<sup>61</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 34. "This connection was somehow severed long ago either through the earth people's harsh words at the sky, or because the strings which lowered the first people to the earth from the sky snapped soon after they set foot on the earth and they were deprived of a means of climbing up again. Or when the first shaman who went unbidden to the heavens to discover the secrets of life and death was punished for his arrogance. His powers were curtailed so that he could now no longer bodily go up there except in spirit, that is, through ecstasy. Or that the heavenly boat which brought the earthlings to the heavens has never returned to pick up the rest of the men. Even the motif of the swan maiden in a veiled manner seems to connote the same hope or nostalgia of earthlings for heaven. If she could go up there, why cannot the children that she had brought forth by a human father?"

<sup>62</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 26, endnote 24. Though of course not all creation myths involve the sky. "The act of creation can be an act of

His next chapter puts forth not less than twenty creation myths of various localities. He identifies recognized motifs among them such that it can be seen that elements of Filipino mythology, of the creation myths at least, that is, are not different from those found in other cultures'. Elsewhere, Leonardo Mercado tabulated nine regional creation myths<sup>63</sup> with the corresponding divinities involved, the situation on earth prior to the creation act, and the particular creation acts themselves. It can be seen from the tabulation that these divinities generally created from something, so that for the Filipinos, it appears that it was not a *creatio ex nihilo* event. Demetrio writes that according to Eliade, myths such as these were of those "who were yet on the level of food-gatherers,"<sup>64</sup> that is, of the Paleanthropesans.

The study on myths today is a far cry from the treatment of them as just stories for entertainment. The misconception that mythology is a theology caused it to become a defeated rival of Christianity, and so its decline in importance.<sup>65</sup> But starting from Vico's time, the seventeenth century, serious attempts at considering myths as "clue to the primitive history of thought"

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thought (Winnebago and Omaha Indians), or the act of uttering a word (Hebrew and Maori) or the churning of the primeval ocean (Vedic India and Japanese), or the breaking of the shell of the primordial egg (Vedic Indian, Greek, Hawaiian); or it can be the act of diving for a piece of dirt or mud from the bottom of the primordial waters (Vedic India, Maidu of South Central California; Iroquoi and Boholano in the Philippines); or the fetching of soil from a far away country (Bagobo, Tausug in the Philippines), or the retching of the creator god (Boshongo); or the dismembering of the body of the primordial being or giant or god (Sumerian or Babylonian, Indian, Chinese), or the gradual ordering of the cosmos from an original chaos as in Hesiod's *Theogony*. The various myths of creation may embody one or more of these motifs or symbols. Cf. Eliade, *From Primitive to Zen; a Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religions* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1967)."

<sup>63</sup> L. N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 1974, 168-70.

<sup>64</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 37.

<sup>65</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Myth, vol. 4, 434.

started.<sup>66</sup> For Levi-Strauss, “myth is a form in which society both understands and misunderstands its own structure.” For Mircea Eliade, “shamanism<sup>67</sup> is part of the central religious tradition of mankind, stretching from primitive African myths to Christian theology, and that it is therefore not, as it first appears to be, an irrational phenomenon.”<sup>68</sup> Jaime Belita, along with several others, generally agrees with them. He says of myths, “They, in fact, are the clues to the mythic and the rational in the Filipino self.”<sup>69</sup>

Belita took hold of the myths of *Malakas* and *Maganda*<sup>70</sup> and of *Juan Tamad*<sup>71</sup> as working representatives of the many Filipino myths. He pointed out features in these two myths that are supposed to be reflections of what the Filipino self is. The Filipino self is characterized by “...its unity and rhythm with nature or cosmos, its struggle to remain nonsalient with its peers, its capacity to see “more” beyond space and time, its forward thrust to a Greater or extended self.”<sup>72</sup>; where at

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<sup>66</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Myth*, vol. 4, 434-5.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 12. Shamanism is the institution in which the person called the *shaman* has access to the Center, where the “gods are operative and their divine power is pervasive.” Demetrio cites shamanism and the motif of the center, which is usually connected with origin myths, as the two most evident phenomena whereby we could examine myths today.

<sup>68</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Myth*, vol. 4, 437.

<sup>69</sup> J. A. Belita, *The Way of Greater Self: Constructing a Theology Around a Filipino Mythos*, 1991, 38.

<sup>70</sup> *Malakas* (meaning, strong) and *Maganda* (meaning, beautiful) were the first man and woman who simultaneously came out of a bamboo stem split by a bird. This is among the most popular creation myths of the Tagalogs. Various interpretations have been applied to this myth, one that is notable takes note of the simultaneous emergence of “power and of grace,” and drawing implications from this.

<sup>71</sup> *Juan Tamad* (*tamad* means *lazy*) is a very popular character. He is usually pictured lying down beneath a guava tree with one of its ripe fruits directly above his opened mouth. He supposedly prefers waiting for it to fall to him rather than pick it himself.

<sup>72</sup> J. A. Belita, *The Way of...* 1991, 50.



the end of the book he concludes, "... the envisioned Greater Self, the penultimate concern of the Filipino people<sup>73</sup> ... is the pivot or the basis for an attempt to do systematic theology in the context of two existential structures in the Filipino psyche: gratuity (*bahala-na*) and reciprocity (*utang-na-loob*).<sup>74</sup> This is how he relates these two structures:

"Its *Bahala-na* attitude which is first of all an experience of life's gratuity and the *utang-na-loob* spirit, an inward reciprocity for the gratuitous. But *utang-na-loob* (reciprocity) has to be unceasing and endless, otherwise it would lack a structure of existence necessary for its being in continuous relatedness; that is why the source of gratuitous existence should never exhaust its capacity for gratuitousness. The dynamism that results from the endless spiral becomes the moving force in a world of interdependence, intersubjectivity and interrelatedness that presuppose only a Greater Self. Man is always left in a quandary, though: if there is the given and the gratuitous, which, far from being his creation, are overwhelming, who or which is the source? The believers believe that it is God."<sup>75</sup>

Looking at the Filipino from a non-mythic angle, L. Mercado arrives at a similar synthesis. The Filipino's worldview, he said, is holistic or non-compartmentalized. As with the Hebrews where man-soul-heart-flesh "imply each other", the *buot* (Ilonggo) or the *loob* (Tagalog) is translated as either intellect, mind, reason, judgment, decision, desire, will, human-heartedness or man from

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<sup>73</sup> Insert here: "... it is a dynamic equivalent of the envisioned kingdom of God ..."

<sup>74</sup> J. A. Belita, *The Way of ...*, 1991, 127.

<sup>75</sup> J. A. Belita, *The Way of ...*, 1991, 50.

the ethical angle.<sup>76</sup> No single English word is equivalent to them. As a man the Filipino does not “separate” his body from his soul, unlike the Greeks, they are individualistic to the extent of jeopardizing their being members of the group. The Filipino “wants all his faculties to be in harmony ... Non-dualism between the individual and others urges the individual to be harmonious in his relations with his *sakop*<sup>77</sup>... harmony-with-nature orientation ... non-dichotomy between the profane and the sacred.”<sup>78</sup>

## E. Modernity

It was the humanists who were responsible for the label “modern” as pertaining to that part of history where the world is in now. They assigned history into three general divisions: the ancient, the dark ages or medieval that was between Rome’s fall and their time, and the modern that starts with them.<sup>79</sup>

Humanism was the mark of the Renaissance. Renaissance, the “rebirth,” happened about the years 1350 to 1600. It was part of the European history that saw concurrent changes in almost all areas of life. The humanists rediscovered the classical Greek writers and thinkers, who believed it was the individual’s duty to pursue excellence in life.<sup>80</sup> So, they rejected the medieval outlook that was stiflingly regulated by the beliefs and practices aimed for the salvation of the soul in the afterlife.

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<sup>76</sup> L. N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 1975, 51.

<sup>77</sup> *Sakop* can be translated as *territory* or *group*. This is a sociologically rich term connoting that the Filipino is non-individualistic.

<sup>78</sup> L. N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 1974, 192. The author used what he called the metalinguistic approach and the phenomenological method in this study.

<sup>79</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana, Renaissance*, vol. 23, 379.

<sup>80</sup> M. Perry et al, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics and Society, Volume I to 1789*, second ed, 1985, 278.

The humanist teachers thought that “the Scholastic logic was too arid and irrelevant to the practical concerns of life.”<sup>81</sup> The humanities – art, literature, history, philosophy, etc., but not theology – were emphasized instead. They thought these “were meant to make (their) students [women were not included here] virtuous and prepare them for contributing best to the public function of the state.”<sup>82</sup> “They valued the full development of human talent and expressed a new excitement about the possibilities of life in this world.”<sup>83</sup> The importance and the potential of man were stressed, in contrast with the medieval belief that “men and women were not only capable of attaining excellence thru their own efforts and talents, but it was wrong and sinful for them even to try.”<sup>84</sup>

Secularism arose:

“The challenge and pleasure of living well in this world seemed more exciting than the promise of heaven.” “... individuals in all endeavors are free of a given destiny imposed by God from the outside – free to make their own destiny guided only by the example of the past, the force of the present circumstances, and the drives of their own inner nature. Individuals, set free from theology, are seen to be products, and in turn the shapers, of history. Their future is not wholly determined by providence, but is partly the work of their own free will.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> E. M. Burns et al, *World Civilization: Their History and Their Culture*, vol. 1, sixth ed, 1982, 565.

<sup>82</sup> E. M. Burns, 1982, 565.

<sup>83</sup> M. Perry, 1985, 270.

<sup>84</sup> M. Perry, 1985, 278. It must be noted though that, “Concurrently, in the sixteenth century a religious upheaval, known as the Protestant revolution, began in Germany and spread to many other countries. This upheaval contributed to the beginnings of the modern era by ending the religious uniformity of the Middle Ages and fostering an upsurge of individualism and rational consciousness.” E. M. Burns, 1982, 557.

<sup>85</sup> M. Perry, 1985, 289.

Individualism arose:

“It valued what was distinctive and superior in an individual, *but* not what was common to all men – the urban elite sought to assert their own personalities, to discover and to express their own peculiar feeling, to demonstrate their unique talents, to win fame and glory, and to fulfill their ambitions.”<sup>86</sup> “Individualism became embedded in the Western soul, and was expressed in artists who sought to capture individual character, in explorers who carved out empires in the New World, and in merchant-capitalists who amassed fortunes.”<sup>87</sup>

Man strove to understand the universe and his place in it *by the use of his reason alone*, which is actually the major underlying force beneath all this upheaval. Along with this Rationalism came modern science, sifted now of unacceptable explanations for natural phenomena, and seeking to accept only those that can be quantitatively verified by anyone at all who has the capability.

As science became more prominent in popular thinking, the philosophical implications of science formulated in the Enlightenment<sup>88</sup> spread to broad sections of the population. Natural processes appeared to be determined by rigid laws, leaving little room for either divine

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<sup>86</sup> M. Perry, 270 and 276.

<sup>87</sup> M. Perry, 1985, 276; Alvin Toffler referred to the coming of the modern era as the Second Wave: “The coming of the Second Wave, for example, was accompanied by the spread of the Protestant Ethic with its emphasis on thrift, unremitting toil, and the deferral of gratification – traits which channeled enormous energies into the tasks of economic development. The Second Wave also brought changes in objectivity-subjectivity, individualism, attitudes toward authority, and the ability to think abstractly, to emphasize and to imagine.”

<sup>88</sup> The Enlightenment, or the enthronement of reason, is the culmination of the intellectual revolution that happened from 1600 to 1789 in Europe. E. M. Burns, 1982, 557.

intervention or of human will. Yet scientific and technical advances had also felt the Enlightenment's optimistic faith in human progress, which now appeared endless and automatic to many middle-class minds. ... Finally the methods of science acquired unrivaled prestige after 1850. For many, the union of careful experiment and abstract theory was the only reliable route to truth and objective reality.<sup>89</sup>

Sociologists also use the term "modernization" to mean the state of affairs that results from the application of the sense of modernity as described, and the process toward these results. Modernization as a state of affairs "denotes those goals to which virtually all modernizing nations aspire: economic well-being, political autonomy, and social equality; a set of beliefs that envisions a better, more just, and more honorable life." As a process, it "refers to the actual attempts at economic, political, and social transformation now underway within the new nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America: programs such as industrialization, agricultural development, the expansion of public education, and the achievement of internal political stability."<sup>90</sup> These new nations are generally those that have emerged from colonialism, so that whatever their backgrounds, and willingly or not, all peoples in the twentieth century are caught up in the process of modernization or "development," which usually turns out to mean acquiring some of the skills and powers first exhibited by Europeans.<sup>91</sup>

Modernity is therefore a mode of existence manifested in abstract ideologies, and in the expression of such, in the society: the nation-state, industrialism,

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<sup>89</sup> J. P. McKay et al, *A History of Western Society*, vol. C: *From the Revolutionary Era to the Present*, third ed, 1987, 788.

<sup>90</sup> R. L. Roe: publisher, *Society Today*, 1971, 521.

<sup>91</sup> R. R. Palmer and J. Colton, *A History of Modern World*, 1995, 9.

science and modern technology, and world-spanning organizations for business and international cooperation.<sup>92</sup> It is a supposed breakaway from the “traditional,” it has been even called a “secular religion,”<sup>93</sup> and for many it connotes progress. Yet right now the traditional and the modern do exist side by side in many societies so that what is there is “... a uniform modern civilization which overlies or penetrates the traditional cultures of the world.”<sup>94</sup>

Thus the presence of the traditional ways of doing things is a sort of a setback for modernity. It is in this context that has put ancient myths and religion at odds with modernity. Science has become the standard of looking at reality so that the ““unscientific” intuitions of poets and revelations of saints seemed hopelessly inferior.”<sup>95</sup>

## **F. Synthesis**

Man everywhere had the propensity to think in a “mythical” manner. This way of thinking still prevails.

Myth is characteristic of all societies, including that of the contemporary West. Myth is not simply the content of a narrative but is equally a universal mode of apprehension of reality. ... Scholars have found that an understanding of the mythical mode of thinking is necessary for a correct understanding of modern human consciousness. They believe that myth is not simply an earlier historical expression of human meaning but is equally a pervasive, structural form of consciousness itself. While it may have

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<sup>92</sup> M. Perry, *Volume II From the 1600s*, second ed, 1985, 864.

<sup>93</sup> R. L. Roe, 1971, 521.

<sup>94</sup> R. R. Palmer and J. Colton, 1995, 9.

<sup>95</sup> J. P. McKay, 1987, 788.

found its fullest expression in past cultures, it still exists in a fragmentary manner as both content and modality in present-day societies.<sup>96</sup>

Man first came to exist in an environment he understood he could not control. Torrential rains overwhelmed him, the deadly winter he could not postpone, and the threat of imminent death was always with him. It has been said that fear was the primary factor for man's fight for survival. He could not understand his environment, but the most obvious explanation to him was that the environment, like him, has a will to accomplish what it intends to do. This explanation helped him to cope, the same way that modern man needs a belief formation with which to operate on.

The origins of myth and religion may be topics for speculation for us now; nevertheless their connectedness is seen in their concern for man's groping with what's real and what's ultimate for his existence. "This urge to provide an explanation, to account for the otherwise random workings of nature and history, has been felt in all human societies since they came into being. Indeed, it is this need to explain and give significance to life that makes us human."<sup>97</sup> This is how sociologists view their importance, which could not be overemphasized.

The famous astronomer Carl Sagan on contemplating the awesome structure of the universe concluded,

"How pallid by comparison are the pretensions of superstition and pseudoscience; how important it is for us to pursue and understand science, that characteristically human behavior. ... No nation, no religion, no economic system, no body of knowledge, is likely to have all the answers for our survival. There must be many

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<sup>96</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana, Mythology*, vol. 19, 706.

<sup>97</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Myths and Culture*, 2003, 135-6.

social systems that would work far better than any now in existence. In the scientific tradition, our task is to find them.”<sup>98</sup>

This contention, that scientific man is capable of “penetrating the deepest mysteries” of the Cosmos,<sup>99</sup> is a superb example of the belief on how far humanism can go. It is so optimistic about human capabilities, so enthusiastic of exploring possibilities, and boldly expecting that there could be more.

Yet this mode of thinking, even the phrases he uses, is glaringly mythical. He said, “we are starstuff pondering the stars;”<sup>100</sup> and he is looking forward to the time when “we can accomplish the integration of the Earth without obliterating cultural differences or destroying ourselves.”<sup>101</sup> The first expression refers to man’s origins and the second is clearly a utopian picture, eschatological; both are myth motifs.<sup>102</sup> Sagan’s thoughts are not at all surprising.

The dominant practical and theoretical forms of contemporary society are in a nonmythological, rational, technical language. The mythological exists as a meaning below the surface. Myth is a way of expressing in language and behavior the ultimate and comprehensive experience of reality. In the appeal to a primordial time of beginning or to an ontologically different future – a characteristic of the problematic nature of modern times resulting from a loss of faith in history as a beneficent and progressive interpretation of human time – myth is present.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> C. Sagan, *Cosmos*, 1980, 332-3.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Cosmos’ is the universe.

<sup>100</sup> C. Sagan, 1980, 345.

<sup>101</sup> C. Sagan, 1980, 337.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. R. Schmidt, 1980, 130-3.

<sup>103</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana, Mythology*, vol. 19, 706.



Sagan speaks of “hugging our infants” as an important part of the solution, since he says the neuropsychologist James W. Prescott “found that cultures that lavish physical affection on infants tend to be disinclined to violence.”<sup>104</sup> No wonder that Filipinos were able to stage the phenomenally bloodless 1986 EDSA revolution; the Filipino belongs to an infant hugging culture.<sup>105</sup> But Sagan seems to be in hot waters when he said “where infants are physically punished, there tends to be slavery, frequent killing, torturing and mutilation of enemies, a devotion to the inferiority of women, and a belief in one or more supernatural beings who intervene in daily life.”<sup>106</sup>

He seems to advocate the misconception that the presence of a feature of primitive religions<sup>107</sup> goes hand in hand with barbarism. He couldn't be more far from the truth since contrary to its connotation, the primitive man was neither dumb nor ignorant. The anthropologist Elman Service had no qualms in interchanging the labels *primitive, ancient, and preliterate* as he disagreed with the negative picture that goes with the terms as pertains to people or societies labeled as such that still exist today.<sup>108</sup> He said, “Anthropologists would deny that these

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<sup>104</sup> C. Sagan, 1980, 331.

<sup>105</sup> The anthropologist Felipe Landa Jocano speaks of the Filipino-s culture of cuddling their infants in *Filipino Social Organization: Traditional Kinship and Family Organization (Anthropology of the Filipino People III)*, Metro Manila, Philippines: PUNLAD Research House, Inc., 1998, 157.

<sup>106</sup> C. Sagan, 1980, 331.

<sup>107</sup> J. B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 1963, 14-31. The other features of contemporary primitive religions are recognition of the sacred; expression of anxiety in ritual; inextricable intermingling of religion and magic; belief in mana; veneration and worship of spirits; recognition of high gods; presence of types of magic; divination; taboo; purification rites; sacrifice; mythology; attitudes toward the dead: ancestor-worship; totemism.

<sup>108</sup> Such as the Arunta of Australia, some American Indian tribes, some tribes of Morocco, Bantu of South Africa, Fuegians of South

people have such a limited mental capacity.”<sup>109</sup> Likewise John Noss said, “As a matter of fact, primitive cultures are often richly developed and have much to commend them qualitatively.”<sup>110</sup> For him the primitives are not “savages,” for the latter term “suggests cruelty, amorality, and barbarism, three terms that are as far from being universally characteristic of preliterate cultures as they are of presumably “higher” literate ones.”

On the other hand, Demetrio has noted that there hardly is an experience of ‘living’ myths among the Filipino lowlanders.<sup>111</sup> Instead what there is are vignettes of some, or are simply folktales and legends. This is, he said, because the venerable *babaylan*’s rituals<sup>112</sup> are hardly ever performed among them. Yet it is obvious that myths are living in the everyday man’s consciousness. The best citation for this is the popularity of the fantasy dramas in primetime television. There are mermaids, birdpeople, fairies, humans with fantastic powers, and enchantresses. The storyline always moves along the tension between good and evil, a prominent mythological motif. In these dramas it is always an assumption that the protagonists are God-fearing characters, and the antagonists are minions of evil forces. It hardly ever happens also that the Supreme Power is featured directly

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America, the Ainu of Japan, many indigenous groups of the Philippines, etc. There could be thousands around the world.

<sup>109</sup> E. R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, 1962, 8.

<sup>110</sup> J. B. Noss, 1963, 3.

<sup>111</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 9. I think myths are also ‘living’ in the sense that they “develop and alter” in time. “The tales themselves, naturally as rich and diverse as the cultures of which they are a part, have changed as a result of differing social conditions over the centuries. As cultures merge or clash on meeting, so the myths develop and alter. Mythology is an organic tradition, living off and feeding back into the lives of the people whose existence it enhances.” *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Myths and Culture*, 2003, 135.

<sup>112</sup> The *babaylan* is the shaman. It is a Bisayan term that is widely used and generally understood in the country.

in the story. His transcendence, his being in the “heavens,” is maintained. This is a recognized attribute of the creator god *Bathala*.<sup>113</sup>

It is also suggested that the communitarian discipline that goes with the rituals of the *babaylan* is evident in the long-suffering character trait of the common Filipino.

The power to cure diseases, to penetrate the secrets of the heart, to know the names of herbs and their medicinal powers, the ability to shamanise, to commune with the spirits and the gods, to call upon them to come and be present – these are gifts vouchsafed only after long, lonesome and, quite often, fearsome initiation. ... Nor is this limited only to the religious functionaries. The community that the shaman, the *arbolaryo* or the sorcerers serve are expected to participate in the rigors undertaken by the religious leader. They must keep long vigils, observe silence for long hours, fast, keep themselves free from sexual pollution, if the medicine-man’s bag or bottle of oil and herbs is to become efficacious again. ... And all these strictures are gone through without murmuring, disgust or ill-will. Everyone seems to understand the purpose of these rituals.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, for the Filipino, “... there are relics among our folk traditions which give us enough indication of the function and value of myths of our people in the past, and this value and function to us moderns are still intelligible. And our awareness of them can make us better human

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<sup>113</sup> “It is common to find among many primitive groups a recognition of the existence of a God far up in the sky or at a great remove, who has made everything, man, earth, sea, and sky, and who at a distance sees all that goes on among men, but, though he sometimes disapproves of what he sees, does not often interfere.” J. B. Noss, 1963, 19.

<sup>114</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 462.

beings for the meaning or truth of these myths is still valid even today.”<sup>115</sup>

Ancient myths, religion and modernity therefore are not mutually exclusive modes of human expression. The human psyche has simultaneously accommodated these three phenomena. Does modern man live within value systems that have bearing with those held by the not yet modern? Yes, he does. Has the ardor of modernity done away with myths? No, it has not. Mythical motifs are even being expressed in the setting of a technological world. Movies can again be cited as examples. Take the *Star Wars* series<sup>116</sup> – its center: the Force; the shaman: the Jedi knights; the battle is between the forces of good and evil; value system: the good is worth fighting for, there is something worth fighting for, to fight is to survive as well as to risk annihilation; the ultimate aim: an evil-free world.

Thus in the technological society of today, “it is clear that modernization in the secular sense is in full swing. And on the surface, some aspects of the humanist meaning are also encouraged. But the deepest layers of modernization as human development are not fostered.”<sup>117</sup> Note this account on the Philippines by a foreign correspondent:

In the early 1990s, Manila, especially the Makati section, had a modern superstructure of hotels and banks, supermarkets, malls, art galleries, and museums. Beneath this structure, however, was a substructure of traditional small neighborhoods and a wide spectrum of life-style ranging from traditional to modern, from those of the inordinately wealthy to those of the abjectly poor ... But in Manila, unlike urban centers in other countries, these economic divisions were

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<sup>115</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 18.

<sup>116</sup> Science fiction movies of the Lucas Film Ltd. Production released in the 1970's by Twentieth– Century Fox.

<sup>117</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 460.

not paralleled by racial or linguistic residential patterns. Manila and other Philippine cities were truly melting pots, in which wealth was the only determinant for residence. ... Whether in poor squatter and slum communities or in middle-class sections of cities, value associated primarily with rural barangays continued to be important in determining expectations, if not always actions. Even when it was clearly impossible to create a warm and personal community in a city neighborhood, Filipinos nevertheless felt that traditional patterns of behavior conducive to such a community should be followed. Hospitality, interdependence, patron-client bonds, and real kinship all continued to be of importance for urban Filipinos.<sup>118</sup>

Spain thought she was modernizing, civilizing, the Philippines, just as America did.<sup>119</sup> When Spain came, albeit accidentally, it was economic gain from prized spices she was after. I'm sure support can be found to the idea that her Christianizing, and thus her modernizing, the "natives" would be from the viewpoint of an all-powerful imperial right to dictate to anybody what was "truth" for her. Thus, the culture that she found when she came, she delegated inferior to hers. From the "natives" point of view, they may have seen the advent of technology more sophisticated than their's; perhaps in the sense that they witnessed not a few demonstrations of capabilities useful for alleviating their everyday work

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<sup>118</sup> R. E. Dolan, 1993, 94-5.

<sup>119</sup> J. W. Vander Zanden, *Sociology: The Core*, third ed, 1993, 319. "In the 1890s President William McKinley explained his decision to wage the expansionist war against Spain and seize Cuba and the Philippines as follows (quoted by McGuire, 1981:188): ...*There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all and to educate the Filipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.*"

necessities, and thus they accommodated the foreigners without fuss into their living sphere. They could have been welcomed.<sup>120</sup> But was the Filipino an uncouth barbarian then? No, he was not; “While many of the details of the pre-European life of Filipinos remain unknown, it is nonetheless apparent that this early culture continues to serve as the foundation for the culture and customs of contemporary Filipinos. Before the arrival of the first Spaniards, Filipino religious beliefs, social organization, gender relations, and material culture were already well developed and exhibited strong similarities among all groups in the islands. Whether in music, literature, dress, architecture, gender relations, or political practices, the indigenous culture continued to shape Filipino sensibilities and guided the adoption of external influences.”<sup>121</sup>

Therefore it is not surprising that until today in the Philippines, in keeping with the people’s close affinity with the spiritual realm, there is a perennial “interest in the unconscious or the subconscious. ... Of late, the charismatic gatherings have proliferated in the nation’s capital as well as in the provincial cities.” What is noteworthy is that, “... It seems that this Philippine phenomenon is but an extension of the ground swell all over the world which has been gathering volume and intensity since the end of World War II, and years following the Vietnam War, and the peak of student activism in Europe and in the USA. Perhaps this is a reaction to the failure of Western leadership in upholding the values that make man what he is.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>120</sup> I would put this initial non-aggression toward the foreigners down to the Filipino’s non-competitive orientation. His dealing with the foreigners was within his *sakop*/harmony virtue, though the history of Filipino revolts against Spain indicate that she was not a “weaking”. See footnote 158.

<sup>121</sup> P. Rodell, 2002, 9.

<sup>122</sup> I conjecture this to be the global dismay, to put it mildly, over the atrocities brought about primarily by the proliferation of wide and long-

interest in the more ancient ways of discovering the authentic human in the midst of world-wide dehumanization.”<sup>123</sup>

Indeed it has been noted also that what is happening is contrary to the 1960s predictions by the social scientists on the eventual demise of religion and the triumph of secularization.

Yet religion has not gone away. Granted, many of the great religious organizations of today may be fated to slide into oblivion. But to notice only their decline and to ignore the vigor of new religious organizations and new religions in general is to look only at sunsets and never at the dawn. In the long course of human experience, many religions have come and gone, but religion has remained.<sup>124</sup>

Sociologists have found out that,

“Although societies claim to have only one faith (and sometimes use military force to keep competing faiths out), this is never really true. ... “underground” faiths exist even in the most repressive nations, and these tend to erupt into significant movements whenever repression eases ... in time the most successful religious organizations become increasingly worldly, a process called *secularization*. As this occurs, conditions become favorable for new

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range wars of varied causes since WWI, where the Western world feature as primary players; these plus the global dynamics that if goes unchecked will result to “serious dislocations, economic warfare, violent struggles over access to vital resources, and eventual nuclear catastrophe.” R. C. North, *The World That Could Be*, 1976, 141; in here the author presents “two crude extreme projections of what the world might look like a hundred years from now,” where one is *Optimistic* and the other is *Pessimistic*.

<sup>123</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 455-7.

<sup>124</sup> R. Stark, *Sociology*, third ed, 1989, 429.

organizations to break away and restore a less worldly form of the conventional faith, a process known as *revival*. ... also wholly new religions can arise, a process called *religious innovation* or *cult formation*.<sup>125</sup>

Thus, we have come full circle. The generalization is that,

“Most men, from primitives in the jungles to members of societies far advanced in culture, do not think that man are all that matters. To think this is to run counter to a very deep feeling, namely, that man depends for life and fullness of being on forces outside himself that share in some sense his own nature and with which he must be in harmony. The harmony thus sought is sometimes a harmony in action, as in primitive religions; or it is a moral or spiritual harmony, as in the great religions of the Near East; or the harmony sought is more than a harmony, it is a complete and final identity, as in most of the religions of India and the Far East.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, Durkheim believes that, “when religion is imperiled and not replaced by a satisfying substitute, society itself is jeopardized: Individuals pursue their private interests without regard for the dictates of the

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<sup>125</sup> R. Stark, 1989, 404.

<sup>126</sup> J. B. Noss, 1963, 3. Thomas Ford Houtliff classifies religion in this manner: “Religions which stress the hereafter, such as traditional Christianity sanctify behavior – ritualistic, familial, political, economic, and the like – which is believed to insure entrance into heaven for eternal life. Religions which stress the here-and-now, such as naturalistic humanism and Ethical Culture, encourage behavior believed to insure the best chance of satisfying survival in this world. And animistic religions aim at pleasing or controlling the spirits believed to inhabit all things in order that chances of survival (physical and otherwise) may be enhanced.” T. F. Houtliff, *The Sociology of Religion*, 1958, 387.



larger social enterprise.”<sup>127</sup> The same idea stated in another way, “Indeed the lack of a common, coherent myth may be a major reason for the fragmentation and alienation so prevalent in modern society.”<sup>128</sup>

## Reflection

Genesis 2:16,17 says, “And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

Genesis 3:22 says, “And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

Thus in mythical language the Christian world is told of the cause why man is capable of knowing the good from the bad.<sup>129</sup> He imbibed forbidden substance. In the next breath it is explained that this is not how it should be. And since he is now like the gods (elohim), which is a violation of the order of the universe, then retribution must be exacted. This is the curtailment of what could have been a sure chance of an existential absolute, the chance of eating from the tree of life, immortality. Of course since this is mythical language then it must be saying not just that. Going back to that statement by Mircea Eliade, “... the “sacred” is an element in the structure of consciousness ...,”<sup>130</sup> what is interesting is the assertion that man cannot but likewise think in

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<sup>127</sup> J. W. Vander Zanden, 1993, 316.

<sup>128</sup> J. P. McAndrew, *People of Power: A Philippine Worldview of Spirit Encounters*, 2001, 14. This statement is by Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and noted ecologist.

<sup>129</sup> The New American Bible version renders the phrase as *the tree of knowledge of good and bad*.

<sup>130</sup> M. Eliade, 1978, Preface. Also footnotes 48 and 32.

mythical terms because of the way his mind is geared to do so. He could not but do it. If it is true that, as Eliade again says, myth “implies the notion of being, of meaning, and of truth,”<sup>131</sup> then there must be a meaning of the phrase “knowledge of good and evil” more profound for the modern man, the one who has been persistently challenging the integrity of these stories, than has ever been put across by hermeneutics. For the question persists: why is it that something so life giving – knowledge – has become the cause of death?

It seems as if this knowledge points to Rationalism. With the coming of it man has claimed that he can know anything just by the power of his reasoning.<sup>132</sup> But its coming in the seventeenth century puts it very late beside the Genesis account. Nevertheless, it has been found that Rationalism is not the salvation of mankind. Benedict Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, and Georg Hegel, each tried to describe how God and the universe are. The first description is, God was an impersonal principle; the second, “the evil in [the world] is an integral part of a total picture of maximum good”; the third, “dismissed all notions of revelation and all claims to know God,”; and fourth, “[God] does not exist in distinction from the world, but only as its animating force.”<sup>133</sup> All these are in violation of the age-old beliefs Christianity holds about God and reality, that God is personal, goodness is anathema to evil, it is only through revelation that God makes Himself known to us, and that He is transcendent

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<sup>131</sup> M. Eliade, 1978, Preface. Also footnote 13.

<sup>132</sup> This conjecture is safe. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary advocates the interpretation that “The inference of God’s commands in vv. 16-17 is that God alone knows what is good for man and that God alone knows what is not good for him. To enjoy the “good” man must trust God and obey him. If an disobeys, he will have to decide for himself what is good and what is not good. While to modern man such a prospect may seem desirable, to the author of Genesis it is the worst fate that could have befallen him.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, F. E. Gæbelein: general editor, 1990, 45.

<sup>133</sup> *Eerdmans’ Handbook to Christian Belief*, 1982, 147-8.

though immanent. Rationalism has not so far rendered these beliefs obsolete. The same is true with the traditional ways and beliefs of almost all countries in Asia, many of which are highly industrialized.

Within the Christian context, rationalism has had its mark on the theologies that have emerged since the Enlightenment. In Rudolf Bultmann's *demythologization*, he made clear his belief that the essentials do not lie on the Gospel narratives per se, and that not all of these related events were historically true.<sup>134</sup> He has offered the alternative way of looking at the essentials as from the perspective that the truth lies in the way these narratives have affected the hearers. Colin Brown says of it, "What matters is not something that Jesus did objectively outside us and for us. Nor is there such a thing as an objective word of God. Jesus is a preacher of the Word, summoning man to decision, and thus enabling us 'to interpret our own existence'. Truth emerges in this subjective response."<sup>135</sup> This was Bultmann's way, it has been said, of trying to couch Christian belief into the modern rational world-view. Another notable formulation is that of the process theology/philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. It was an effort at bridging gaps within his Christian faith, and evidently between it and quantitative science. Process emphasizes that everything is an energy event that is continually becoming. God, who is himself an event, persistently influences and is influenced by these events.<sup>136</sup>

However, the advent of rationalism has enabled man to better assess his perspectives as regards to his 'existential' beliefs. For instance, a conclusion now is that, "All religions say one way or another that man does

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<sup>134</sup> *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christian Belief*, 1982, 458.

<sup>135</sup> C. Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, 1968, 187.

<sup>136</sup> See L. S. Ford, *The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism*, 1978; J. Cobb, Jr. and D. Griffin, *Process: An Introductory Exposition*, 1976; E. Cousins: editor, *Process Theology: basic writings by the key thinkers of a major modern movement*, 1971.

not, and cannot, stand alone. He is vitally related with and even dependent on powers in Nature and Society external to himself. Dimly or clearly, he knows that he is not an independent center of force capable of standing apart from the world.”<sup>137</sup> It has become clearer to him that he needs much more than what he can procure for himself. For most people they have found out that there are what can be called, for the lack of a more precise term, emotional or psychological needs that cannot be reasoned away.<sup>138</sup> This is also true for modern Americans. “It is true that the American religious economy is very diverse. Over 1,200 religious denominations exist in the United States (Melton, 1978). Church attendance is high – in any given week, about 40 percent of Americans attend services. Moreover, almost two-thirds of Americans (62 percent) are official members of a local congregation.”<sup>139</sup>

Granting that science as a body of knowledge and as a way of looking at the world has done much for the alleviation of human misery, say in terms of combating diseases, it also has brought about devices for unprecedented degrees of violence. Now Einstein has said that: “Concern for man himself must always

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<sup>137</sup> J. B. Noss, 1963, 2.

<sup>138</sup> Speaking on myths, philosophy professor Richard L. Purtill wrote, “The usual “demythologizer” wants to remove these “mythological accretions” and recover the historical facts underneath them (as suggested by the title of Albert Schweitzer’s work *In Quest of the Historical Jesus*). More recently, some theologians have in various ways tried to suggest that we accept the four Gospels as original myth ... The motivation for this kind of suggestion is very often the realization that a person who accepts neither gospel nor original myth lives in an impoverished world, that there is a human need that was once satisfied by original myth and is still satisfied for many by gospel, a need that can be damaging to the human personality if it goes unfulfilled. ... I think that it might be called the need for *significant form* in our experience. We want to be able to relate the things that happen to us as parts of an understandable whole.” R. L. Purtill, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion*, 1984, 4.

<sup>139</sup> R. Stark, 1989, 418.

constitute the chief objective of all technological effort ... to assure that the result of our scientific thinking may be a blessing to mankind, and not a curse.”<sup>140</sup> This means therefore that, since man has a choice, the invention and use of weapons of mass destruction is not an innocent result of amoral science, but is in fact within the realm of human accountability. As the physicist Jacob Bronowski laments,

“It is said that science will dehumanize people and turn them into numbers. That is false. Look for yourself. This is the concentration camp and crematorium at Auschwitz. This is where people were turned into numbers. Into this pond were flushed the ashes of some four million people. And that was not done by gas. It was done by arrogance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality, this is how they behave. This is what man can do when they aspire to the knowledge of gods.”<sup>141</sup>

It was man, together with his nonscientific belief system, his dearly held set of convictions that has veered our earth toward this alarming reality.

Humanity has always acknowledged that threat constantly looms over his head. And so, realizing that he rarely lives for a century, he is pressed to find what the significance is, if there is any, of so short a lifetime of occasional ecstasies and predominant pains. The futurist Alvin Toffler offers a description of man in this plight. He says, “Individuals need life structure. A life lacking in comprehensive structure is an aimless wreck. The absence of structure breeds breakdown. ... The feeling that our lives “count” comes from healthy relationships with the surrounding society – from family, corporation,

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<sup>140</sup> *The Cosmos of Arthur Holly Compton*, edited by Marjorie Johnston with an introduction by Vannevar Bush, 1967, 65.

<sup>141</sup> J. Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*, 1973, 347.

church, or political movement. It also depends on being able to see ourselves as part of a larger, even cosmic, scheme of things.”<sup>142</sup>

Almost a century ago an epochal event happened: “Then, in 1905, Einstein suggested that the laws of physics as we observe them may be in no way dependent upon how fast we are moving through space. It is only how fast an object is moving relative to us that, in his view, can affect the way things on this object appear to act ... The only motion that has any meaning, according to the special theory of relativity, is the motion of one object relative to another.”<sup>143</sup>

The parallelism in these two insights cannot be ignored. It's as if the two statements are in agreement with the idea that we as persons cannot have a description of how we are unless we connect it with something else. Likewise, something else will appear to us according to how we are. But much more than that, they are saying that everything is interconnected. They are saying that each is a part of another, such that the larger picture is that of a unity of interrelated and interdependent things. Nothing in this picture exists in isolation.

The vital importance of interrelated and interdependent existence is clear in the atomic level. Take a gold atom, for instance. At this configuration, albeit submicroscopic now, the complete set of characteristics of being a substance called gold is present in it. These characteristics disappear once the atom is dismantled, so that the separate parts – electron, proton, neutron, and others – have the same characteristics as that of any other particle like them. It was their being together, held by forces in nature, that made them part of gold. Apart, there is no trace left of their being once part of a gold atom. The same is true

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<sup>142</sup> A. Toffler, *Third Wave*, 1980, 389-90.

<sup>143</sup> *The Cosmos of Arthur...*, 1967, 209.

with all other atoms in the universe. Thus is humanity. Statements as related to each other as these are refreshing in the midst of scurrying ideas in that they can continually bring home the realization that there is an Unshakeable Truth Transcendent yet Immanent.

The sociologist Stark is more specific with his conclusion. He says,

“So long as people want to know what existence means, so long as they are prone to disappointment, suffering, and death, the religious impulse will not be stilled. Only religions, only systems of thought that include belief in the supernatural, can address problems of this magnitude. ... No one, neither the rich nor the poor, can achieve immortality in the natural world. And both rich and poor seek to find meaning in existence. The rich as well as the poor join religions.”<sup>144</sup>

Furthermore, Smith pushes it a little further when he said, “It is one of the illusions of rationalism that the universal principles of religion are more important than the rites and rituals from which they grow.”<sup>145</sup>

The implication of this in missions is enormous. The Spaniards and the Americans did violence to our cultural psyche by rashly introducing to it new ways of thinking and feeling without the benefit of first exploring how they should fit in. The way we think and feel about ourselves has been muddled and has gone awry – like, having Caucasian-fair skin and having a good English or Spanish diction is preferable to otherwise. A concrete manifestation of this violence is the way our history was modified in the telling. “Filipino and American historians have recreated the Philippine Revolution to suit the political needs of succeeding generations, disregarding

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<sup>144</sup> R. Stark, 1989, 429.

<sup>145</sup> H. Smith, *The Religions of Man*, 1958, 4.

aspects that now emerge so clearly in Alvarez's accounts – an embittered factionalism, strong undercurrents of messianism and animism, and a violent machismo. To give their new nation Western-style heroes and heroism, postwar Filipino historians often stripped these events of their authenticity.”<sup>146</sup>

I hope that when Bronowski said, “We have to cure ourselves of the itch for absolute knowledge and power. We have to close the distance between the push button order and the human act; We have to touch people,”<sup>147</sup> he meant that none of us will ever be in the place to claim to have acquired the standard to which all knowledge must be measured against. He meant that we each one of us, are in the position to contemplate on the consequences of our dogma-dictated actions. He meant that ultimately it is the person, the people, the humanity, that counts.

Pure rationalism could be our death. It denies that aspect of our being, our nonrational intuition, that has in fact enabled us to survive in a – let's say it clear – unpredictable world. We are very much inside the system of living. We have no capability of detaching ourselves to stand from a perspective that will allow us to assess the whole picture all at once, and have a once-for-all comprehensive say about everything; like standing in a museum gallery and looking at a picture canvass and say what there is to say about it right there and then.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> S. V. Alvarez, *The Katipunan and the Revolution: Memoirs of a General*. with the Original Tagalog text, Translated into English by Paula Carolina S. Malay, 1992, back cover.

<sup>147</sup> J. Bronowski, 1973, 347.

<sup>148</sup> Science does not deny this. “Physicists believe that the universe operates according to a set of immutable laws that may never be fully revealed and that may even be fundamentally unknowable in their entirety. That belief is an act of faith as human as any and, indeed, as profoundly human as any belief that has been shared by mankind.” D.S. Saxon and W. B. Fretter, *Physics for the Liberal Arts Student*, 1971, 11.



Pure rationalism could be our death in that it offers a pseudo-freedom. Man knows that the possibilities are too vast for him to account for, yet in saying that he is capable of navigating through them he limits “reality” to only what he can systematically present to his understanding. It is as if he has just acquired for himself a way of limiting freedom.

Jesus said, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”(John 3:8 NIV) The element of unpredictability is part of truth.<sup>149</sup> Again physics echoes this fact. For instance, in its branch known as quantum mechanics, it has been found out that an electron’s position about the nucleus cannot be determined at the same time as its velocity<sup>150</sup> -- getting hold of either of these quantities alters the other – implying that it is impossible to have a perfect description of any particular atom at any time.<sup>151</sup>

Yet the other side of it is that God has not let us lose in a directionless sea of chaos. In John 8:12 Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Granting that this statement smacks of myth-sense, without even pointing out features of Biblical criticism that must get into

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<sup>149</sup> I cannot help but cite as a parallel idea the sense of unpredictability in the name YHWH, the name that God made known of Himself to Moses at the burning bush, which is *I am who I am*, or *I will be what I will be* (Ex. 3:13-14). The root is actually a first person verb meaning *to be* or *to happen*, which scholars agree connote activity; it has a dynamic meaning better yet rendered as *it came to pass* or *it will come to pass*. B. W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, second edition, 1966, 38-9.

<sup>150</sup> Velocity is speed with corresponding direction.

<sup>151</sup> This is a feature of what is called the Uncertainty Principle, usually connected with the physicist Werner Heisenberg, a contemporary of A. Einstein. James Burke put it this way, “... every description of reality contains some essential and irretrievable uncertainty and the observer, in the observing, modifies the phenomenon...” J. Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed*, 1985, 301.

the picture, what cannot be denied is that the globe, even the universe, as much as the atom, is confined within a limited system. And within this system is an awesome gamut of interactions rationalism still hopes to conquer.<sup>152</sup> What is more awesome is that Christianity, in the John 8:12 sense, claims to have conquered this system.

The elucidation to the claim to absolute truth is in the avenue of Christian apologetics, an ancient, well trod, and thriving discipline. For many, the easiest way out of this difficulty is the confession of faith, as in Hebrews 11:1 (NAB): “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen,” taken either in or out of context. Still there are those who would challenge in the manner of the proof-of-the-pudding-is-in-the-eating argument. That is, Christianity does not cry out for rational or rhetoric defense, but begs to be lived. Any defense of it from “inside” obviously runs the risk of being called biased, and therefore contentious.

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<sup>152</sup> “Through casual modeling, simulation, and forecasting techniques, the analyst or policymaker can infer with a high degree of confidence what values a given society has acted upon with some consistency over a period of 30 years or more in the past. From 1946 through 1975, for example, we can identify and plot the major trends that have taken place and can also postulate what *societal* values have prevailed and have actually been invoked. We can even test and calibrate our tools by inserting historical data for part of this period of time, such as from 1946 to 1951, and forecasting the trends (as if we had not already established them) through 1975. At that point it is possible to compare the forecasted trends with the real-world trends and calculate the error. Assuming that major trends of the past (and the values that produced them) will continue into the future, we can then make forecasts for 30, 40, or 50 years into the real future. Having achieved this baseline projection on the basis of very explicit, though perhaps unrealistic, assumptions about the future, it is possible to introduce alternate values – different overall investment patterns, demographic or economic growth rates, national budgetary allocations, income distributions, and the like – and observe the probable outcomes. In this way, thousands of alternative futures can be generated with all assumptions and each introduction of a new value recorded and made explicit.” R. C. North, *The World That Could Be*, 1976, 135.

Personally, I am an adherent of it with the original reason that I was born into it, which is also the case for the overwhelming majority of the Filipinos. My society is aware of this level of commonality, and it has been a well-tested unifying social force. Although, its being labeled as “folk” (i.e., folk Christianity/ Catholicism/ Protestantism) has not reached mainstream discussions yet, but not to imply that Filipinos would care much about this label, and so may not be even interested in fussing about it.

I believe that this claim of Christianity to truth cannot be discerned from its manifest institutions or from its dogmas alone. Like with the electron of the atom, it's as if our putting of the essentials into words and systematized thought frames have ossified the “movement” of the “spirit”, so that what we have left in hand is only an impression of what is not there anymore. Likewise, the wind must have speed and direction. Getting hold of it, arresting its material to analyze it, will nullify it. Besides, its molecular composition is so diffuse and motile all the time that empirical science will be hard put at describing it comprehensively, much less make a precise projection of it. So it is with Christianity. M. Richard Shaull writes,

“The Christian gospel does not stand over against man’s self-understanding, not by absolutizing the human experience of the past but by pointing to a reality of judgment and a power of transfiguration at work in the midst of contemporary existence. In fact, Christian faith can contribute to the formation of the *new man* only when it becomes incarnate in a community that has the power to do this. ... God’s action in the world has something of the quality of “mystery”; it constantly pushes beyond the limits of our human understanding of it ... the fact that the church is described more by images than by rational definitions suggests that it “is a divine mystery that cannot be circumscribed by

doctrinal or institutional measurements.” New events occur which shatter old limitations; and the work of the Spirit breaks out of the boundaries set by the institution.”<sup>153</sup>

Sagan points out, “About two-thirds of the mass of the human brain is in the cerebral cortex, devoted to intuition and reason. Humans have evolved gregariously.” He is saying that he believes it is a physiological need for humans to be together, living in close proximity to one another. We are creatures with inbuilt capacity for connectedness, and we cannot operate on reason alone. The systematization of communication symbols takes too long a time, and we cannot afford to wait for that. Personal interactions are constant and simultaneous. Our immediate survival is largely a function of our intuition.

So much so that the substance of Christianity, not being in the institutions and dogmas, is in the immediate sphere of living, in the doing. Quoting P. W. Bridgman, “The true meaning of the term is to be found by observing what a man does with it, not what he says about it.” Jesus answered the scribes when asked which commandment is the most important, “ ... ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second one is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”<sup>154</sup> Jesus was speaking of the integral man, the man who at once thinks, feels, and acts. He may be the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable (Luke 10:30-37).

The Filipino may not have living myths anymore if seen from the scarcity of displays of old rituals, but his myth-sense is very much palpable. Look at the way he

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<sup>153</sup> M. R. Shaull, *Toward a Reformulation of Objectives*, article. *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission: The Ecumenical-Conservative Encounter*, 1968, 90-3. The included quote is by Paul Minear.

<sup>154</sup> Mark 12:29-31.

transforms fallible mortals into heroes, most recently manifested in the Fernando Poe, Jr. phenomenon. Again, what could be the myth-sense behind the persistent OFW reality, where it has come to be known that in the US, at least a *Filipino* is a domestic help, almost equivalent to a slave in feudalistic era?

The Filipino's longsuffering was mentioned earlier. What I want to point out now is that the Filipino's sense of self-worth is community-based, in the *iririmaw taton*<sup>155</sup> mentality, so that the suffering of a degrading label is refused of an adverse effect, at least emotional-wise. Yes, abstractly the label is degrading, but nevertheless we, as a people have collectively established a justification for our existence.

Looking at this labor and brain drain<sup>156</sup> phenomenon from another perspective, I say it is a feature of the Filipino's spirituality. It is a manifestation of his immunity to the threat of abrupt environmental, physical, as well as cultural changes. Almost everyone agrees that he/she thrives wherever he/she is in the world. I can connect this feature with the fact that our locality is devoid of geographic barriers. We have open seas, minimal mountain systems, non-abrupt and non-extreme changes of climate. All these have allowed us to own a steady and secure sense of safety. We do have tribes, so presumably tribal wars also, but these were generally unremarkably bloodthirst-wise. We do not have major tales of war. These nonbarriers connote that we were free to move about. If so then it makes sense that we as people have not played reason against intuition, we have not tried to put delineation between the two. For intuition, and therefore myths and religion, are, I believe to be

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<sup>155</sup> This is a Kiniray-a phrase; can be translated as, "we are together"; similar to the *sakop* mentality; the communal sense.

<sup>156</sup> Many have now labeled it a *hemorrhage*.

God-provided faculties for humans to cope with the fluid dynamics of living.<sup>157</sup>

I say that truth is not relative. It is only that we have different and limited capabilities of perceiving it, as to where we are situated in time within our history or as to the cultures of our land that makes it seem so. So that when Demetrio argues, "It is in the peoples' mores and manners, beliefs and basic orientations to life and reality, further specified by their peculiar cultures and traditions, that the missionary is to uncover God and His Christ to them (c.f. John 1:9),"<sup>158</sup> he directly hits the target.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Also, the Filipino is able to move comfortably within a small personal space. Living spaces are not really much, even in rural settings where ample space is available for house construction. The typical Filipino family's dwelling space is not of the sprawling and lofty types. Doubtless this is largely due to the size that the basic building material – bamboo – can conveniently accommodate. Nevertheless, it is not a new fact that the urban dwellers is squeezed into relatively small spaces with hardly breathing rooms, yet still manage to be minimally bothered by it. This is most notable in boarding houses of students, as well as in the most popular public transport, the *jeepney*, which is like a small bus. Thus the Filipino exists within a highly dynamic sphere of interaction brought about by close bodily proximity, so much so that the reaction-response facilities must be highly sensitive and immediate. See footnote 105.

<sup>158</sup> F. R. Demetrio, 1990, 146.

<sup>159</sup> But how this should be done, that is another thing. The church people have been working on this for a long time now, with these talks on *paradigms* and *paradigm shifts* with regards to *missions* and *evangelism*. As these systematizations take time (again), meanwhile this bottom line as quoted by C. S. Lewis must be our working formula: Do not waste time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. (*Mere Christianity*, 116) It should be noted though that the Spaniards, without their intention, was able to "provide lowland Philippine society with a language for articulating its own values, ideals, and even hopes of liberation. After the destruction or decline of native epic traditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Filipinos nevertheless continued to maintain a coherent image of the world and their place in it through their familiarity with the *pasyon*, an epic that appears to be alien in content, but upon closer examination in a historical context, reveals the vitality of the Filipino mind." The *pasyon* is a verse composition in the local tongue of the

Finally, the tension between modernity, and ancient myths and religion has been profoundly put forth with this statement:

“Social and cultural trends of the past few centuries have culminated in an age of skepticism, secularism, and materialism. For many, there is little left but a defensive scorn for the true believer. It is a scorn which, perhaps, helps to hide the self-pity that must arise among men who have lost the guideposts of the ages and, what is more devastating, are convinced that they are lost forever.”<sup>160</sup>

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salvation history starting even from Genesis through Christ’s Passion. It is chanted responsively by the people in the local community during the Holy Week celebrations. There were several editions of it by different Filipino authors and revisers. The intention was for the “Spanish colonizers to inculcate among the *Indios* loyalty to Spain and Church; moreover, they encouraged resignation to things as they were and instilled preoccupation with morality and the afterlife rather than with conditions in this world.” (R. C. Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910*, 1979, 12.) So that what appeared to be an attempt at adapting the Gospel narrative to a local literary form had an ulterior motive behind it. As such, the hope of the masses for freedom from the foreign oppressors was being rekindled again and again. The result was that “From 1565 to 1898, there were hundreds of revolts and individual acts of defiance against Iberian rule. The causes of these rebellions ranged from single antforeignism to revenge against individual abusive government officials or friars, to revolt against excessive taxation.” (P. Rodell, 2002, 11)

<sup>160</sup> T. F. Hout, *The Sociology of Religion*, 1958, 387. Furthermore, the sociologist Lawrence K. Frank comments on modernity and rationalism, “All over the world today, historically developed cultures are breaking down, losing their former integrity, as people abandon their long accepted sanctions and symbol systems. To use the old expression, the “cake of custom” has been broken; and as the “unseen hand” of tradition no longer provides guidance for individual and group living, people are becoming troubled, uncertain, and anxious, facing increasing confusion and conflict which they are unable to resolve. ... Thus people everywhere are faced with the task of renewing their culture and creating an industrial civilization. This means replacing the many self-defeating patterns that have been

## Conclusion

Ancient myth, with its supernatural subjects; religion, with its dogmas and institutions; and modernity, with its systematizing everything that can be dealt with quantitatively, each have in them man's formulations of what is real for him. Over this attempt of the expression of his beliefs is the thrust toward the Absolute, the reality or the existence of which can only either be believed in or not, since no adequate instrument has yet been produced to prove its existence to the satisfaction of science, the major force of the day.

In the course of scientific research, nature has been found to be exhibiting behavior reflective of the non-surety of events from man's side, and the insistence of interrelatedness and interdependence among each other for man's grope for existential meaning. How man describes nature scientifically seems not to be in opposition to the dynamics that he experiences as a feeling and thinking social being. I am sure there are many other instances like this that can be cited, and the doing so should not come in as a surprise if the assumption is that only one Creator is responsible for all. Just as the psalmist wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands ..."<sup>161</sup>

The West has not been successful in completely replacing the Filipino's core consciousness – the one where concern for community and interpersonal relationships can override the concern for oneself (*utang-*

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used for ordering, controlling, and rationalizing the nonrational human organism. The challenging creative task is to provide more fruitful and socially productive ways for coping with our persistent human predicament: each of us has to function as an organism while living as a personality in a symbolic cultural world and participating in the social order." H. Hoagland and R. W. Burhoe, *Evolution and Man's Progress*, 1962, 170.

<sup>161</sup> Psalm 19:1, NIV.



*na-loob* and *bahala-na*), the one where he is comfortable with beliefs that escape reason. With this the Filipino has remained “flexible” and thriving, like his traditional housing material, the bamboo. Rather, the rationalistic worldview, the one that came out in force during the Renaissance, has been found to be wanting in giving full dignity to man. We are now in that stage of historic time, I think, where the claims of humanism and rationalism are being seriously questioned.

God’s revelation as handed down to us in the Scriptures is incomplete, as it is, if just isolated aspects of it are deemed legitimate for consideration. In fact there is no perfect basis for concluding that the myth sense of the narratives is irrelevant for modern man. What is apparent is that man continues to deal with his world in a mythical sense, implying that myth-talk was not just a stage in the evolution of human reasoning – that is, if there is one – but is actually a facility for man’s being able to assign meanings, significance, to whatever it is he is dealing with.

As such, his primary concern is still that of life and death, in whatever parlance he might speak of them. The core of the Christian message has an excellent answer for it. It is love in freedom, as well as freedom in love. The gist of the matter is that, the bringer of the gospel and the gospel himself, whether referred to as Jesus Christ or Jesus of Nazareth, emphasizes that rationality comes second to nonrationality in this matter. His only demand was faith as that of a child’s, the one that feels and thinks and acts at the same time. As he has said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Luke 18:17, NIV.

## Recommendations

Browsing through my university library's Filipiniana Collection has made me realize that my total stay in school was very much impoverished as to giving me a clear picture of who I am in connection with my own people in this particular part of the globe. I was leafing through several thin paperback monographs, belying their weight in scholarly research and worth in pointing out to me and my generation that this was how we were, this is how we are now, and hence should be of great aid in our going forth from here. These are monographs by Filipino sociologists and anthropologists, lonely sojourners in paths shunned by most of us who would not think anymore, by reasons relatively legitimate, beyond what could be put on the table day after day.

The richness of Philippine mythology was opened up to me by Fr. F. R. Demetrio, S. J.'s *Myths and Symbols: Philippines* (Revised Edition). The intricacy of popular Filipino religiosity is partly explored by several De La Salle University professors in *and GOD said: HALA!* edited by Jaime A. Belita, C. M., himself one of the contributors. Likewise the evangelical Rodney L. Henry's *Filipino Spirit World* does so, and is a rare contribution to the predominantly Roman Catholic authorships on matters of the Philippine "spirit world." Its dealing with the pertinent issues is lucid and non-evading. In the book *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* by Leonardo N. Mercado, S.V.D., the way a Filipino individual thinks and feels is explored. Here is an excellent base on which the various Filipino religious affiliations can have more meaningful dialogue, not least between Philippine Roman Catholicism and Philippine Protestantism. Understanding the Filipino psyche have important implications to our educational system, as to how lessons should be delivered perhaps for efficient learning. All books by the anthropologist F. Landa Jocano are likewise invaluable. I think all these, and many others of the same kind that I

did not come across, are must-reads for a student of theology here in the Philippines. Understanding ourselves as a nation will help us teach our young ones how to sift through unregulated foreign influences streaming into our ever evolving culture by way of media and the cyberspace, thereby ensuing perhaps the relevance or the integrity of our societal structure. This way we do not become blind to our society's needs.

Add to these is the name Jaime C. Bulatao, S. J., author of *Phenomena and Their Interpretation*. Parts of this volume is a bit more specialized in research studies exploring areas related to extra-sensory perception/paranormal phenomena among the Filipinos, and so tries to scientifically study the connection between the 'spiritual' and the physical realms in our setting. This anthropological/sociological area of the Philippines is grossly neglected despite the enormous popularity Filipino "faith" healers have around the world, even before the 1970s. Also, in *Newsweek's* October 4, 2004 issue is the article *Brain Check* written by Herbert Benson, M. D., Julie Corliss, and Geoffrey Cowley. It speaks of scientific research being done concerning the connection between the human being's physical body and the mind. *Logotherapist* Viktor E. Frankl, himself a victim of Auschwitz, was convinced of this. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning* he said, "Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man – his courage and hope, or lack of them – and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect."<sup>163</sup> I might as well mention Carl Sagan's book *Broca's Brain*, exploring the human brain's structure and

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<sup>163</sup> V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: an introduction to logotherapy, a revised and enlarged edition of From Death Camp to Existentialism*, 1962, 75.

capabilities. All these are mentioned in connection with the statement, "... myth is ... a pervasive structural form of consciousness,"<sup>164</sup> with the conjecture that science might one day uncover a physical explanation for the persistence of man's mythical way of expressing himself. Science seems to be in the verge of systematically showing that a person's different 'parts,' – perhaps his physical, thinking, and feeling parts – have connections that can be qualified empirically. These ideas somehow advocate the Hebrew and the Filipino concept of seeing the individual holistically.

Speculations about the future of the world, technology-wise, is about as modern as imaginations can get. Alvin Toffler's *Third Wave* and Robert North's *The World That Could Be* are more than speculations about the future. Their evaluations of the way the world is going based from the past has about the same interesting endpoint, that is, that the be all and end all of all human explorations is ideally the personal human himself and his society. As expected the theological aspect of man does not feature much in these works, nevertheless their obvious humanistic concerns are valuable in the further study of man, God's most special creation.

Of what importance are the modern theological formulations therefore? The ordinary churchgoer here in the Philippines is not even aware of them. Ideas on decades-old publications have not found their way yet into the mainstream, still waiting on the bookshelves for those few who are motivated enough to search for and discover them. And even if they are found they are generally not integrated immediately into the belief

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<sup>164</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana, Mythology*, vol. 19, 706.

confession of the congregation. Nevertheless, C. P. Cavafy urges us all to:<sup>165</sup>

Let us speak, let us speak —  
silence does not suit us,  
since we have been created  
in the image of the word.  
Let us speak, let us speak —  
since within us  
speaks divine thought ...

It is a predominant ancient belief that words have power. However this belief may be explained, it must be acknowledged that these modern theological formulations, offshoots of the rationalistic fever, are now part of the integral whole. As such more formulations will be manifested using them as points of departure, or as tangential points. They have become road marks with which other perspectives can be explored.

The Filipino religiosity may be sympathetic to some of these theologies and not to others, yet precisely in this awareness about them can the Filipino be able to define his position better, and as such be more sure of how he is going and where he is going. He will use these road marks freely, being clear to him that he is as legitimate as any peoples to establish his self-defined position.

This has been possible since the beginning, even before the false myth of the superior race was destroyed. F. Boas notes, "... of the appalling monotony of the fundamental ideas of mankind all over the globe."<sup>166</sup> He said this was the reason, "The similarity of cultural elements regardless of race, environment and economic conditions may also be explained as a result of parallel development based on the similarity of the psychic

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<sup>165</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Toward a Philosophy of Praxis*, A. Block and G. Czuczka, editors, 1981, 11.

<sup>166</sup> F. Boas, 1966, 154.

structure of man the world over.”<sup>167</sup> So man, being made of the same basic stuff, being made of the same raw material, will consequently generate ideas of the same type, though expressed differently.

The author of Colossians 3:11 affirms this legitimacy to freedom of everyone as: *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.* (NIV) The author of 1Corinthians 12:13 legitimates this possibility: *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.* (NIV) The Spirit, this is the contention of our rational consciousness. The nonrational, however, has no problem with it. Jesus Christ brought with him the good news that there is a way out of oppressive systems and debilitating perspectives, if only we are willing to take the risk of following the leading of “the Spirit [that] breaks out of the boundaries...”<sup>168</sup> wherever we are situated.

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<sup>167</sup> F. Boas, 1966, 177.

<sup>168</sup> From footnote 153.

# **COPING WITH DEATH, SEPARATION AND LOSS<sup>1</sup>**

*Dr. Calixto C. Sodoy*

Grief is a normal process to a loss of a person (loved one), thing (precious possession) or relationships (friends, pets) for which we have cared deeply. Our goal is not to avoid grief but to deal with it wisely and creatively. Unresolved grief can be very harmful. It may be compounded with confusion, guilt, fear, and isolation and can lead to physical illness.<sup>2</sup>

Most experts agree that overcoming grief is work thus the term “grief work” is commonly used when dealing with bereavement. Grief work refers to our ability to go through the dynamics of grieving. In each of us the degree of experiencing the loss (or losses) brings forth varied responses due mainly to the differences of our inner personal dynamics in responding to outside stimuli. There are however, areas of convergence in dealing with the dynamics of grieving.

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture delivered at the CPU Annual Memorial Lecture Series in honor of the late Rev. Dr. Johnny Gumban, former dean of the College of Theology, Central Philippine University, Jaro, Iloilo City, Philippines on January 19, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Morgan, *A Manual of Death Education and Simple Burial* (Burnsville, North Carolina: Celso Press, 1984), p.21.

Erich Lindermann listed 6 categories of grief work one must undergo leading towards healing. These are the following:

1. Facing Pain
2. Permitting emotional expression
3. Emancipation of bondage to the other
4. Readjustment to altered environment
5. Formation of new relationships
6. Acceptance<sup>3</sup>

I will attempt to use these categories of “grief work” using my personal experience as a point of reference in exploring this subject. This presentation is partly academic and partly autobiographical. My wife passed away 10 years ago. Therefore, I consider myself as one of the authoritative experts on this subject because of my personal experience. Bear in mind that this is just a “one-man” experience.

## **1. Facing the Pain**

Establishing the reality of death is very important in resolving grief. Temptations abound to avoid seeing or facing the reality of death or losses. A person can avoid the pain by literally avoiding looking at the dead body or by being emotionally detach from the whole experience of grieving. The use of drugs to ease the pain of the bereaved must be minimized or avoided. To induce a state of stupor during mourning would block seeing the reality of death experience. It is important that the bereaved person participates in the planning and execution of funeral arrangements if he or she is able to do so. Saying “goodbye” must be encouraged. The religious ritual of commendation for the body and soul to

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<sup>3</sup> Erick Lindermann, “Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief,” (*American Journal of Psychiatry* 101, 1944), pp. 141-148.



God is a valid healing resource. Doing a good deed in memory of the departed loved one is another healing resource.

## **2. Permitting emotional expression**

This is a very important process in resolving grief. Permission given to oneself is a positive act of letting go the tears, the sobs, the self-pity, the acknowledgement of weakness and emotional pain. Just as one must directly face the pain, one must face the tears which go along with it. One must look at oneself and say, "I weep, I am someone who must weep." Failure to do is a denial of one's humanity and a rejection of part of oneself, a self-mutilation of emotional feeling.<sup>4</sup> In bereavement, shedding tears is a form of emotional release. Crying often is a normal process of grief-the letting go of one's emotional burden. One may prefer to cry alone but there is a therapeutic effect when the tears of sadness and pain are shared with a trusted family member, friend, pastor, priest or rabbi. Allowing the bereaved to talk "over and over again" about the departed loved one has a healing effect. This behavior is an attempt to re-live the past experiences and relationships with the departed. This is especially true when death occurred suddenly or unexpectedly. As time goes on the "retelling of the same old story" will diminish and eventually the frequency will stop. This is assuming that the normal process of grieving is being taken care of.

Dreaming, sighting, smelling, hearing familiar voices of a loved one who died is a common occurrence. Do not be alarmed by these phenomena. It shows that you still need to relate closely with your beloved. The spirit has

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<sup>4</sup> D.J. Bane, A.H., Neely, R. Reeves. Jr., editors, *Death and Ministry, Pastoral Care of the Dying and Bereaved* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p.84.

the capacity to transcend physical boundaries in order to bring the past relationships alive again.

I look forward to having a dream about my wife because that means we have visited each other. Lately, I seldom dreamt simply because my psyche had adjusted well in dealing with her “absence.” If the dream is horrifying this is an indication that there is unresolved agenda in your relationship. This is a signal of a disturbed psyche which a trained counselor can help you sort it out.

### **3. Emancipation from bondage to the other**

The human heart and mind can bind oneself forever to the beloved who died. The bonding is usually strong when death has newly occurred. As time goes on the physical absence of the beloved becomes real and believable. However, the bonding of the spirit or “thoughts for each other” could not be cut off merely by the physical absence of the beloved. There is wisdom in observing “All Souls (Saints) Day” annually. This event does carry a therapeutic effect by carrying on the value laden familial bonding experiences and relationships. Generation after generation carrying on the tradition celebrating “the love that binds us” frees the living from obsessively thinking everyday of the dead loved ones. There is always a special day during the year that we can devote ourselves to renewing our relationship to “those who were gone before us.” So when the grief work of “emancipation” is done completely, the bereaved can move on through life ready to bond with another “significant other.” This bonding can be expressed in terms of human relating, vocational commitment or any activity that provides lasting benefits. The pursuit of personal satisfactions in human relationships and in a work-a-day world is a good sign that the grief process is in a good “working order.” The focus is toward having a sense of self-fulfillment, personal satisfaction and purposeful meaning. He/she may get married again,

develop a new career or devote her/his time to taking care of the grandchildren. These are ways to “emancipate” oneself from grief. Now you can see that the grieving process has moved away from “bonding enslavement” to greater freedom and personal autonomy of forming a new bonding experience with “significant other” within the realm of human experience.

#### **4. Readjustment to altered environment**

The phenomenon of change especially if you have no choice on the matter is difficult to accept. Death of a loved one is “one hell of a change” to anyone. Jack Silby Miller in his book, “The Healing Power of Grief”, tells a story of a woman coming to him a few months after her husband’s death saying; “I wish to hell they’d buried me along with Earl.” Mr. Miller made a further comment, “I knew she was half ironic, half serious. She meant it but she didn’t mean it. She was caught between the two worlds.”<sup>5</sup> There are many bereaved people who have had a hard time altering their usual environment to a new one-adjusting to a new life style. When this thing is happening, the grieving process gets delayed. With no good intervention one may choose to get sick or have a slow death syndrome such as, drunkenness, gambling assets away, carelessness in grooming and eating habits, etc.

There is a real ambivalence of choosing between *Eros* (love of life) and *Thanatos* (love of death). I know for quite sometime after my wife died that I was wishing to get sick and so I am not worried if I die. I was not suicidal in the real sense but I was ambivalent of wanting to say “good bye” from the land of the living. It was doubly difficult for me because when my wife died my children were all gone to college and graduate school. Right after

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<sup>5</sup> Jack B. Miller, *Healing Power of Grief* (New York: Seabury Press, 1988), p.32.

graduation they all got married. (I gave my two daughters elegant and beautiful weddings although they were quite expensive). In the middle of bereavement I was exposed to an “empty nest syndrome” because my big house was empty of significant people. For the first five years of my wife’s death I also wanted to live alone. I sold the big house in the suburb (lots of good and bad memories) and bought a front beach Condo. There, I live alone for more than five years until I got tired of grieving (crying often). This profiled me to move to Houston to develop a new congregation among first generation Filipino immigrants. While in Houston, my intermittent “crying” stopped. My coming back to CPU, although this was my hope and dream since I left in 1971 for further studies at Princeton and Chicago, may still have something to do with working out my grief. Indeed, this present involvement is serving me well even as I seek out new adventure in the pursuit of purposeful and meaningful life.

## **5. Formation of New Relationships**

The freeing of oneself from grieving allow the bereaved person to move forward in forming new relationships. The relationships may be directed to a significant human being or to developing a deeper involvement in the pursuit of meaningful mission in life. The latter rings true to my personal experience. I do not “busy” myself looking for a wife instead, I “busy” myself to seeking meaningful life style that is fulfilling and rewarding to myself and to others as well. I am at this point of “re-investing” myself to a “new world” of purposeful living. I decided to invest myself into this world to find new meaning and to grasp new reason for being.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, *The Healing Power of Grief*, p.30.

## **6. Acceptance**

This is the culmination of “grief work” process. The bereaved accepted the death or sense of loss as part of his/her own personal story. The pain of loss, the readjustment to altered environment, and the formation of new relationships are all accepted and integrated into oneself or personhood. Acceptance implies that one “feels right” about the death experience. Surely, acceptance frees the grieving person from the unresolved grief symptoms. The final process of grief work is done and total healing begins.

### **Implications for Pastoral Care (or for other Professional Care Givers)**

The quality of care giving is crucial in the grieving process. In most cases grief work involves individual person or group of persons (family members). In both situations, communicating the mercy and love of God can be construed as insufficient especially if it is not done appropriately. A caregiver who is a pastor, priest or rabbi or a dedicated religious layperson have the enviable position to present himself as one who represent the presence of God in the midst of pain and suffering brought about by the death of a loved one. While other helping professions may be very good in the “ministry of doing” like the social workers, medical doctors, nurses, etc, clergy persons and religious laypersons are equipped to bring about the “ministry of being” to the suffering person. The “ministry of being” implies that even in the midst of pain God is interested in bringing mercy and love to anyone who needs it. This form of care can be carried out through the following: a) ministry of listening, b) ministry of acceptance, and c) ministry of presence.

## The Ministry of Listening

One author calls it “holy listening.” It is called “holy listening” because the one who listens does not concentrate primarily to himself/herself. Rather, the act of listening is directed mainly to the other person who needs care. This quality of listening is free of “personal baggage” or personal agenda brought along by a caregiver. Instead, the Caregiver must attend to the “excess baggage,” the bereaved person carries. Listening to the needs of the other person and not listening to your own agenda or needs is the “name of the game.” Your attention and focus is given primary to the bereaved person and not vice versa. Holy listening encourages the bereaved person to open up freely without fear of being condemned, criticized or judged. It has “educative” quality which means that the goal is to draw out the person to talk or share the inmost concerns of his/her being. A sure sign that you failed in listening is when you hear yourself talking more with the person you are counseling with. Example: *Nagdamgo ako sang bana ko kagab-i. Buhi gid siya sa akon damgo* (I dreamt of my husband last night. He was so much alive in my dream). Immediately, you interrupted: *“Ako nagdamgo man sang akon bana”* (I also dreamt of my husband) and then you went on and on retelling your own dream. You were so excited about it that you gave no time to listen to the other person who started sharing his/her dream. What then, is happening here? You failed to listen to the other person’s dream. Instead, you were preoccupied retelling your own dream experience. This means you are interested more on yourself and not with the other person. It takes great personal sacrifice to listen. It means being willing to give up something. Henry Thoreau once said: “It takes two to speak truth- one to speak, and the other to listen.” You sacrifice to listen in order to know the other person better, to understand the meaning of her/his experience, and to see his/her perception of the traumatic event. It is a

personal sacrifice to listen because you are voluntarily refraining from inserting your own psychic “material” in the process. All your attention- one hundred percent is devoted to understanding what the other person is saying at least for a time being. It is believed that the average person receives very little of this high quality listening from loved ones, probably less than 10 minutes per week. For example, when a friend says, “Howdy?” or “How are you?” in the context of Texas lifestyle, is just a casual greeting. It is not an invitation for you to open up your heartaches or personal problems expecting that the person who asked “Howdy?” will stop and listen to you for 5 or 10 minutes. Listening deeply is a valued asset in helping the bereaved person.

### **The Ministry of Acceptance**

Acceptance involves “unconditional loving.” This means that the caregiver must accept the bereaved person’s agenda or concerns. Your pre-conceived prejudices, personal taste, behavioral sensibilities or religiosity must be put aside in order for you to reach out in the level of the bereaved. The goal is to achieve a deep level of personal relating and or emphatic understanding with the person in need. It is important that you get into the frame of reference of the person you are giving care instead of attending to your own frame of reference. For example, you hear the counselee say: *“Daw mahikog gid ako”* (I feel like committing suicide). Your answer, *“Indi. Sala gid ina sa Dios.”* (Don’t. That is “sin” in God’s eyes). Your posture here is more of judging/condemning instead of counseling. In helping the bereaved, you must defer your own value judgments. (Keep it at the back of your mind). Instead, focus on and accept the validity of his/her thoughts of committing suicide. To the average person who is not trained in counseling, a suicidal thought can be very threatening. It is threatening to you who is listening as well as to the

person thinking about it. And when both of you are afraid about it, the non-acceptance or the devaluing of the suicidal thought becomes the end result. Therefore, you ignore or deny the authenticity of the psychic material which in this case is the suicidal thought. You pretend and hope that the possibility of real happening will not happen. Worst, still you will reprimand the suicidal person or warn the person not to say a word about it. So both of you will just keep quiet about it or do it in a “hush, hush” gossipy way. By not accepting it as “real”, you failed to deal with it openly and the process of having an informed therapeutic intervention failed. The “conspiracy of silence” can have a devastating effect on the bereaved persons especially if they have morbid thoughts.

### **The Ministry of Presence**

This type of care giving may involve “doing nothing” but your undivided attention is given to the bereaved person in need. This means that you are not spending “idle time” with each other instead, your “feeling presence” is with the person you are ministering. Feeling presence means being attuned with the feeling of the other person in the moment.<sup>7</sup> The best example for this is to see and witness old fashioned Filipino lovers sitting at a distance from each other, yet the feeling of love and romance “prevailing in the air” warms their hearts and their whole being at the very present moment. When the bereaved relates to you his/her deep sadness, you as a listener must get into the same intensity of feeling sad with the person you listened to. This is easy to say but difficult to follow through. The spiritual principle to make this happen is when there is a sense of “high calling” on the part of the pastor. Carl Rogers called it “unconditional

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<sup>7</sup> Calixto C. Soday, *Pastoral Ministry to the Bereaved Child* (Doctoral thesis presented to Chicago Theological Seminary, 7 June 1978, Chicago, Illinois), p.27.



positive regard.” Roger was once a theological student at Union Theological Seminary in New York. His psychological theory comes from the theological motif of the Christian understanding of how God in Christ came and received us “unconditionally...even when we were yet sinners.” In the ministry of “feeling presence” you may appear to be “doing nothing,” however the personal presence of the ordained clergy person or commissioned religious layperson symbolizes the presence of God in the room where the ministry of “presence” is taking place. Your personal presence sends a powerful message that the love and mercy of God is present in the midst of suffering and pain among the bereaved loved ones.

### **Concluding Comment**

The clergy person among all helping professionals has the enviable position to care for the sick, the dying and the bereaved. When all human efforts fail, i.e., medical cure, exhausted financial resources, etc., the “man of the cloth” will continue to be in the forefront carrying on the caring/healing mission of his/her call. We have in our “medicine kit” the theological faith belief affirmation that we are God’s own even when we say “good bye” from the “land of the living.” The bereaved person will continue to come to us for comfort and solace because we represent to them the God who will not “abandon nor forsake us” even when death comes.



# **TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF DEATH: DEATH IN LIFE AND LIFE IN DEATH<sup>1</sup>**

*Dr. Domingo J. Diel, Jr.*

Allow me some preliminary comments about this lecture which is part of the Centennial Lecture Series of the College of Theology for 2004. For participating in this Series of Lectures, I am thanking the Dean, the Dr. Limuel Equiña, and not least, Pres. Dr. Juanito A. Acanto for supporting/ encouraging such an occasion for the university community.

This lecture is drawn (not simply excerpt) from a Masteral Thesis in Theology submitted in 1968 to the United Theological College, Bangalore, India, and had been graded with distinction by the Serampore University Senate in India.

The Thesis was under the Advisorship of a Syrian Orthodox priest- Theologian, who was a Ph. D. graduate of Princeton, USA.

I am dealing with the subject: "Towards A Theology of Death: Death in Life and Life in Death" under two parts, (1) An Evaluation of the Concept of Death by Three Theologians (Rahner, Berdyaev and Barth), and (2) A Positive Statement/ Reflection on Death. It goes without saying that each part carries several points. So that you will not become anxious of the length of the Lecture, and start yourself counting the points with the Lecturer in the

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture delivered for the Centennial Celebration, Central Philippine University, September 21, 2004.

process, I will not mention how many points has each part consists, but I assure you, you will not be retained here unnecessarily, in other words, against your will!

Let me start with two quotations – one from a Nobel Prize in Literature recipient; and the other, from the Servant of Servants in Rome (Servo Servorum), the Roman Pontiff: “The old ethnic tribes, e.g. Russian, Tartars, Wotjaks, made no great (fuss) affair, nor tried to oppose it (death)... they faced it with composure, and preparations were made in time... then they departed without struggle, as if they were simply to transfer to a new house”, (free translation from the German of Alexander Solschenizen’s).

The other quotation comes from Pope John XXIII, the Pope, who became famous in the Christian world and beyond, because he had called the convocation of the II Vatican Council (1963- 1965). He said, “My suitcase has been packed... I am ready.” (free translation from German).

Both quotations refer to how one faces death as a reality of life: whether it comes from the highest- ranked ecclesiastical Christian personality or whether it comes from ethnic tribes of far away lands in the Caucasus, whether Christians or those belonging to other faiths. It is reflected in these two quotations as I perceive it: preparation, readiness composure and trust- confidence in the face of this reality! But this is not however simply a question or questions of how to face death, but I suggest that we also ask the question why the Pope, on one hand; and the ethnic groups (in the Caucasus), on the other hand, could behave or have this kind of outlook or attitude and orientation in the face of death? Why was there such a “composure”, why was there such a “readiness” in the face of death, which is as real as life itself? Although, there may be examples, whose outlook could just be the opposite of what had been mentioned, there are many more examples coming from various tribes (and peoples) all over the world; or examples from

other faiths, like Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and a couple more of Chinese religions portraying or showing an outlook or attitude towards death similar to that I cited above.

And it could be that we or among us there are those who may have this or that outlook or orientation towards death, or to use the figure again from the Pope: "I have packed the suitcase... I am ready." Some of us must already have packed the suitcase, hence are ready; some may still be packing, hence not quite ready. Others may not have even started to pack any suitcase, hence nothing is ready at all! Did I make the simple figure of speech of Pope John XXIII, complicated? Not really, I simply expanded it, and may I suggest that we do not confuse the person, who packs, and his suitcase. My simple understanding is that, the Pope had made ready his life for death. In other words, he had lived his life to the full; henceforth he is ready to go! You may remember another person saying along the same vein: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Hence forth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day...II Tim 4:7-8 (KJV)." What then is death towards which we prepare in life and at every moment of life, we are confronted by it?

### **Section A: An Evaluation of Rahner 1904, Berdyaev 1874- 1948 and Barth 1886-1968**

There are significant points about death brought out separately by Rahner, Berdyaev and Barth which now needed consideration together. These are mainly concepts on which the three theologians evidently present similar ideas. Where they differ, it will be indicated.

Man has a definite limit and end to his physical existence. This end expresses itself in death. Both Rahner and Barth hold that this genuine end of man

shows that man is really man, living in a specified time in history; a historical being, subject to history. On the other hand, Berdyaev maintains, that if there had been no death and life continues forever in this world, it would have had no meaning. Meaning is never revealed in an endless time. Only death gives true depth to the question as to the meaning of life.

Apparently, this shows that death is a normal and natural part of creation. How could it be otherwise? Life is intended to be meaningful and death gives meaning to it. Man actually lives in time – a historical being and death seals that reality. As a matter of fact, Barth claims that in a Creator-creature relationship of God and man, death is a sign which clearly defines the relationship. Death also distinguishes the Creator from the creature: the creature having always the mark of death in him, while the Creator, the Source and Goal of Life. Rahner asks whether death is not a natural consequence of the constitution of man as the unity of body and spirit. And besides, death in an individual is not merely an event coming from the outside, as it was imposed upon man. It is a human act from within, so Rahner holds, a manifestation of man's participation by faith in the destiny of the Lord.

Actually this is just one side of the nature of death. The other side is what all the three emphatically hold – death is the result of sin. They differ in their understanding of sin, but of the consequence, they are basically in agreement. Berdyaev is quite clear on this. He calls death as the most terrible and final evil that happens to man not only as a mortal being, but as a sinful mortal being in a fallen sinful world. As long as there is sin, there is to be fear – fear of judgment and the future which is death itself. Barth and Rahner are no less emphatic in connecting sin, judgment and death. Rahner believes that death which man experiences is an expression, consequence and punishment of the perdition that comes to him from the sin of Adam. It is a

visible manifestation of the punishment of the sin of man who has been estranged and alienated from God. Barth puts it even more plainly when he said that man's radical corruption merits judgment in death.

The idea of existence of the whole man ending definitively in death rules out the theory of natural immortality of the soul, on the one hand, and the concept of the cyclic return of the soul into the world in the process of reincarnation, on the other. For man, death happens only once. His death is unrepeatable and unique in significance. Rahner and Berdyaev however, offer some explanation of the nature of existence beyond death. But that can wait for a later discussion.

Death is also held by the three theologians as present throughout the whole life of man. Death should not only be understood as the last moment of life but as a reality present all through life. In other words, the life of man is filled with death and dying. It is a continuous dying and man experiences constantly the end in everything. This is borne out by the fact that man lives an existence which is guilty throughout; hence he is entangled and submerged in death all his life. To Barth for example, man is faced continuously by two choices: the gracious God, which means life and the abyss of nothingness, which means death. And because man by himself, cannot alter his guilty being, his life is already marked by its end. The threat of death does not only overshadow but also dominates his whole life. And if nevertheless, man lives in the midst of death, it is because here and now he encounters the eternal redemption in Jesus Christ. Likewise, Rahner sees the presence of death in life as man's act of fulfillment which is achieved through the whole of his life and not just an isolated point at the end of life. In other words, man enacts his death as his own consummation through the deed of his life.

The concept inevitably places life in a serious frame. It may affect a morbid feeling in man who always think of death and fear it. Hence, a life dominated by fear such as

this is never healthy. But it may also affect in man a sense of urgency towards responsibility not only for his own life but for the life of other men who are threatened by death and nothingness as well. It is an up-to-date concept which is a potent corrective to modern tendency of taking life slipshod because nothing really matters.

The final point on which the three theologians are essentially in agreement is the conviction that death is not the final word for man. For Barth, death is a defeated foe in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, death has not merely been endured but overcome. In Him, man has been delivered from sin, guilt and therefore from death. On the other hand, Rahner looks at death in the light of death of man under grace. Such death is a dying in Christ – Barth also holds the same idea – therefore it is a saving event. It is a culmination both of the reception and the effecting of the salvation of man who participates in the death of Jesus Christ through the process of dying throughout his life. This act of participation finds visible expression in the receiving of the sacrament of Baptism, the Eucharist, and Extreme Unction. Likewise with Berdyaev, man conquers death by participating in the life and death of Christ. It means, freely accepting it while he is in full communion with the source of Life. Only then can man overcome the destructive consequence of death.

Consequently, it raises the question of the resurrection. The three theologians grapple with this problem and basically come to the same conclusion: there is an 'immortality' of a difference among the three. On this question however, lies in their understanding of the nature of existence after the termination of physical life.

Barth offers no exposition about the nature of the intermediate state of the dead. He, nevertheless, rejects the idea that the dead are in the state of sleep and interprets St. Paul's word in I Thess. 4:14 – KOEMASTHAI – as simply 'to fall asleep' and not 'to be asleep.' According to him, the early Christians were not



interested in such question. What they were more concerned with and interested in was the confession of Jesus Christ: 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.'

Barth is unequivocal of the Christian Hope for the future. It is the hope of the redemption in the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. A redemption which means the resurrection of the flesh – a deliverance from death into eternal life. Beyond this, Barth does not attempt any speculative theory on the existence after death.

In Berdyaev, one sees a development of a theory. He maintains the concept of resurrection life attainable only through Jesus Christ. However, he expounds an idea of immortality in terms of an integral personality of man. Personality, for Berdyaev, is the unity of all human powers and possibilities. This is what is immortal, since it is the eternal idea of God.

He points out that a natural man does not possess the natural quality of eternal life or immortality. By implication, the whole man or the integral personality takes an immortal aspect only after it has attained a new spiritual life in the spirit. Moreover, such personality, Berdyaev claims, does not mature in this life, but reaches full maturity after death in eternity. Death, in other words, reveals its positive value by opening up for the personality of man an opportunity for a full development through an eschatological resurrection of individual body and the body of the world.

Berdyaev further maintains the concept of the solidarity of man and the world. He says that the resurrection of man is at the same time the resurrection of the body of the world; 'personal eschatology' is interlaced with 'universal and historical eschatology'. This means immortality cannot be separated from that of other men and of the world. The whole basis of the concept is love: the universal-divine-love incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is the nature of this love to desire a universal salvation from death and a universal resurrection of all. This is true.

But Berdyaev in his enthusiasm for universalism seems to have overlooked his own emphatic concept of man who can act freely and has the moral right to be free. Hence, man can choose otherwise, than to be in the scheme of universal salvation or universal resurrection. Besides, love incarnate in Jesus Christ does not force everybody to go to heaven, although it persuades all; nor force every man to be resurrected. The desire of love for universal salvation and resurrection is quite another thing from love's carrying out that desire into fulfillment by overruling the freedom of the personality of man. Man is so dependent, in fact a slave, to his society, the state and the world, but he is also independent: a king over all these. This dialectic tension in Berdyaev's thought is lost or contradicted in his own insistence on universal salvation of all men and a universal resurrection of everyone. After all, did he not claim that man has also the moral right (in freedom) to choose hell and therefore death??

Rahner, on the other hand, develops a much more elaborate theory on the question of the nature and manners of man's existence after death. He explains this in terms of pancosmic relationship. Upon this concept, he builds two other related ideas, viz. a continuous maturing or development of the personal spirit after death and a maturing process as an aspect of the punishment of venial sins in Purgatory. For Rahner, resurrection means the termination and perfection of the whole man before God who gives him 'eternal life.' And because man is a many-sided being, the process of his perfection and the entrance into such perfection is not a simple, identical quantity in every respect. The 'moment' of completion of such stratified being is not the same for every one of these dimensions. Furthermore, the personal spirit is in a pancosmic relationship with the world and therefore the end of the world is also its perfection and consummation. Rahner rejects the concept of the Second Coming of Christ as an event enacted in a localized manner of the

stage of unchanged world. He believes however, that the Second Coming takes place at the 'moment' of the perfection of the world. In such moment, the God-man will be revealed to all reality and to everyone of its parts, as the innermost secret and center of all the world and of all history.<sup>2</sup> If we follow Rahner's argument, there is not only a 'moment' of perfection of personal spirit but also 'moments', for there is not only one personal spirit but many and each being many-sided, differs from one another in their moments of fulfillment or consummation. We inevitably ask, to which of these 'moments' does the 'moment' of the perfection of the world corresponds? Will it correspond to the very last man who dies or to the very last man who perfects himself in a pancosmic relationship to the world? If the Second Coming of Christ awaits for 'a moment' of perfection of the whole universe, in order to take place then probably it will never take place. Rahner seems to minimize, if not overlook, the disintegrating forces that work as a whole. True, he insists that the end of the world will not be a sheer cessation, a 'being-no-longer' of the world itself, but the participation in the perfection of the spirit. This sounds logical, if one deals only with a moment of perfection of a spirit which corresponds to a moment of perfection of the world, but if one faces the world of personal spirits which differ in their moments of perfection from one another, one wonders whether there really would be a moment of the end with a freely achieved completion and a state of finality.

The broader base which Rahner offers the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory is to be noted. The negative purging and cleansing punishment of venial sins in Purgatory – the official Roman Catholic doctrine – becomes to Rahner, a process of maturing of the personal spirit (with venial sins in pancosmic relationship) through which all the power of the human being are integrated into the basic decision of the free person. Rahner emphasizes the

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<sup>2</sup> K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. II, London, 1963, p. 312.

idea that 'remission' in Purgatory means not only purging as punishments for sins but 'remission' as development or maturing. So that when a person is released from it, he is a different being from him when he first entered into it. What seems not clear in Rahner's discussion of Purgatory is whether the whole universe with pancosmic relationship is a sort of Purgatory, where all personal spirits mature, or whether Purgatory exists as a place within the world or side by side with it, offering the same manner of relationship among its inmates, as those in the world. If the first case is true, then Purgatory as a place may not be a useful place anymore – the whole universe is there anyway where one develops and matures from his sins and disunity. If the latter is right – then what is the difference between one's maturing in the universe and in purgatory when both have similar manner of relationship and purpose? Rahner minimizes the negative aspect of punishment of venial sins in Purgatory by making it appear that one gets over it, when one matures in the process.

### **Section B: A Positive Statement On Death**

From ancient times to the present day there has always been different attitudes towards death. The Indians and the Chinese – at least the majority of them – believe in the transmigration of the soul. A concept which maintains that when a man dies, his soul is born again in another man or in an animal in the process of reincarnation. That price of rebirth goes on – in a cycle? – until the soul is purified from its wicked deeds, each time it is born into the world. A similar belief is found among the early Roman Pagans. They held the view that their souls must pass through successive lives and death until purified from sin and stained of the body by numberless sojourns in the world. And finally by virtuous lives on earth they find satisfaction and rest. Or again from primitive-animist man, comes a psychological conclusion

that whether one likes it or not, his ghost will continue to live some kind of life after his earthy life is over. Then of course, there is the Greek classical theory of the natural immortality of the soul according to which, death is the great liberator. So long as man lives, his soul is in a prison of the body which is essentially alien to it. The body is only an outer garment which prevents the soul from moving freely and living in conformity with its proper eternal essence. Death leads the soul out of the prison of the body to its eternal home. And finally, there is the Hebrew-Christian tradition about death. According to this concept, death involves the whole man – the living soul – and not just the body. The whole man who has really died is recalled to life by a new act of creation in the Resurrection. Death is conquered and man becomes, as it were, immortal through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and through faith in Him.

Today, these ideas which are very much alive, although probably in different forms, have far-reaching influence and effect upon the whole outlook of man to life in general and to the Christian faith in particular. Two main concepts of death are worth noting here. It is from these concepts that different attitudes to life, to values and to the future, are derived. On the one hand, death is viewed – figuratively – as a ‘wall’, an ultimate personal disaster: the end of human life. On the other hand, death is regarded as a ‘doorway’, a point in time on the way to eternity: a door to another but better room. From these opposite points of view we get also corresponding attitudes of man towards his whole existence. There is, for instance, the skeptic’s acceptance of the inevitable which oftentimes leads to the repression of the thought of death by life itself. And there is also the elevation of death as something that gives meaning to life or as the precondition for the true and fuller life of man. The former finds death as the natural end of the process of life and the latter perceives death as the dissolution of bodily life and beginning of a new life.

The fact of death is to be accepted and recognized. It is probably the only thing one can be sure of in this present life. It is a reality that concerns every man: his whole life, his total personality, all his values, and his future. Therefore, it is an event of life which is of utmost seriousness, not only because it ends all human life, existence and enterprise, but also it is a reality present throughout man's life. In other words, man does not only live – if he truly lives – in anticipation of the end, when his life ceases to be and he is no more, but he lives moment by moment being confronted by death and dissolution. This no doubt, places life in a serious frame. But one may object that such life will neither be healthy nor happy. How can life be happy when it is lived under fear and terror of death? An objector proposes that death must be considered a 'blessing', a 'friend' and a 'brother'. Fear of death has no place in man's life, for it arises from a lack of trust in the love and power of God. The trouble with the whole objection is that it threatens the reality of death too naively and considers trust as absolutely exclusive terms, let alone as simple alternatives. The verdict of both Brunner and Barth on this objection is that it simply falls to face up seriously with the grim reality of death. In fact Barth goes further by saying that it is always man deceived and doubly deluded who speaks of death as though it were kindly angel of light. John Baillie shares in the verdict when he says that there could be no shallower thing than to face the partings and bereavements, dissolution and corruption in which every life is full as mere cheeriness. He further says that death is a most solemn crisis and extremity, a threshold of eternal judgment, on the brink of which all of us are standing every moment.<sup>3</sup>

Death poses as a serious event in human existence because it threatens to end all human enterprise and achievement. We can see this if we have accepted the

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<sup>3</sup> John Baillie, *And The Life Everlasting*, London, 1936, p. 284

fact that sin affected not only man in the depth of his being but also the whole of his work and achievement. In other words, there is nothing in the sphere of human activities that is spared from sin and corruption. 'For all have sinned and the wages of sin is death.'

The Kingdom of the world have come and gone, the achievements of mankind have their glory, splendor and hope, but the last two World Wars shattered all hopes about the capacity of man to build anew the Tower of Babel. The story of the Tower of Babel is not merely a legend for children's entertainment during Sunday School Days. If it teaches anything at all, it is this one truth: that man's enterprise founded on pride and arrogance – and which one is not? – ends up in destruction and dissolution. Today man benefits tremendously from his own achievements in science, technology, and education and in almost all fields of human endeavor. But it is not also true that he is threatened at the same time by the holocaust of the third nuclear world war? To deny this is to bury our head in the sand.

We can still make our problem more specific and particular. The parable of the Rich Fool recorded in St. Luke's gospel chapter 12 shows not only what real life should consist of, but also what it should not. But there is one other lesson we can derive from this parable. Man himself is not really the absolute arbiter of his life, plan, work or accomplishment. This rich man thought that after his barn became full for his plentiful harvest, he can really settle down and be at ease: eating, drinking and getting merry, because he has many years still ahead of him during which he could feel secure and be happy. It turned out to be an illusion. He was a fool to think that way, so the record says, because that very night his life was claimed from him. And what really remains was the divine question: "this night your soul is required of you: and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Lk. 12:12). As a matter of fact, that rich man has never had chance to finish his plan; much less enjoy anything that

he had. Death has the final word. Today, many examples could be cited of individuals whose plans or enterprises in life end when they themselves die. It must be clear, however, that we are not referring so much to all human enterprises treated individually. Certainly there are a number of individual enterprises and achievements that go on to benefit mankind long after the death of their founders or initiators. But it cannot be gainsaid that all these, even the most successful ones, are under the threat of dissolution and sooner or later, will end up in death and disintegration.

An extreme outlook grew out of this belief. Such attitude is discernible in humanism, which is only interested in the present life, i.e., a life of man between birth and death. It is not interested at all, much less bothered, about the question of 'immortality' or life-after-death. What is important is the life of man here and now. In fact, it sometimes raises the question whether immortality or resurrection is desirable at all. It charges that those whose eyes are fixed on the splendor of heaven are blinded to the more intimate riches of the earth and 'those whose real hopes are in eternity have always been lacking in zeal for the progress in time.'<sup>4</sup> Both of these charges have the same basis of interest: the world or the earth, here and now.

We combine these charges into one and answer it in two ways. Firstly, the conclusion of the charges does not necessarily follow the premise. It is true, that from the early Church down through the ages to the present time we have people who, because they have been enamored by the vision of heaven and the assurance of eternity – in spite of the stark reality of death in between – lost their true sense of living real human life on earth. In modern terms they are usually called either 'puritans' or 'quietists.' These people are sometimes characterized – appropriately to some extent – as those who are

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<sup>4</sup> John Baillie, *And The Life Everlasting*, London, 1936, p. 24



confronted with their own personal salvation and spiritual growth. They have nothing to do with the world because it is evil. Or, those people who are mere spectators to what is happening in the world in its progress and development; in its suffering and failures. This tendency can be observed in both the ancient and modern Church. But it does not really prove that the 'vision of heaven' and the 'hope of eternity' make man automatically indifferent to the world or society where he lives. Nor does it necessarily make him unconcerned of his own life and his neighbor's here and now.

It is rather a distortion of what it means to live a truly human life now, under the shadow and dominance of death and at the same time having the hope of eternity. It is a tendency, or call it a movement, that resulted from rigid separation of the secular and sacred realms, which characterized the past history of the Church. The Integration, therefore, of the sacred and the secular in terms of the unity of life of the individual and his relation to all men, makes human life under the threat of disintegration and death all throughout, more meaningful and decisive. In other words, it is real life – not just a preparatory life intended for heaven – that must be lived now fully and meaningfully. A life which is concerned not only of one's own, but also of one's neighbor, the society and the world. It is a life whose concern is expressed both in words and in works, and whose awareness of its limit and boundary in death never dims, but becomes ever urgent through the passing of time.

Secondly, the attitude that immortality or resurrection life is not necessary does not really coincide with actual facts in human life when such life is confronted with death. One wonders whether this attitude is not rather a 'pleasant (?)' rationalization against a 'morbid (?)' constant thought of death. Or to put it in another figure, is this not the result of a strong preference for the riches and ornaments of Egypt than the milk and honey of the Promised Land? Baillie himself remarks that no one,

even a cad could stand by his beloved's deathbed and say (or think) that he was not interested in immortality.

Another concept related to the belief of 'immortality' or resurrection-life is the idea of human personality. A life of man is incomprehensible if what is there to it, is only existence between birth and death. There is more than just that: it has a higher destiny and fulfillment. Such destiny and fulfillment are realized only in a personality that shared in the life of the Risen Lord. It means a human personality that has been born anew into a spiritual life in Jesus Christ. And therefore, even here and now, that personality has resurrection-life or eternal life. Thus, when we speak of human personality that is immortal, we do not mean anything else but that. It is true that man's life here on earth even though he has already the gift of eternal life, does not reach or complete fulfillment. Man arrives to that stage only when He who is perfect comes, even the Lord Jesus Christ. But the question still remains to be answered: Does man's personality, viz. his whole integral being, continue to live and develop or mature into perfection after his life in the body ends? Or does he fall asleep in death and wait for the final and great Day of the Lord at the Resurrection? The objector cited at the beginning of this section is not really bothered about these questions. But it seems that these are basic questions which must be faced seriously. To us, the symbol of the great and final Day of the Lord in the Resurrection is more meaningful in the context of 'those who have fallen asleep' and are waiting for their resurrection than the idea that the 'spiritual soul' or the 'integral personality' lives on – on a different level of existence and matures into perfection.

Finally we must have something to say as we minister to the dying and the bereaved. While this can be considered one of the delicate ministries of the Church to her members, it seems to be one of those 'neglected' tasks of the Church in general, and of the pastor in particular. This fact is well borne out by the numerous

articles, which appear in journals and periodicals dealing with pastoral questions during the last few years. All of them try to stress in one way or another the importance of ministering to the dying. Also a good number of books on the subject of dying and death – approached historically, sociologically; culturally or theologically – have been published within these past few years. Such interest demands now our attention and practical comments. It is a general consensus among doctors, pastors, hospital chaplains, clinical psychologists and counselors, that death or dying is a fatal crisis in man's life because it does not only threaten the loss of life we cherish, it also threatens the loss of life's values we live by. It likewise, threatens to cut once and for all human personal relationships with loved ones and friends. The result of such crisis and intense feeling of loss is utter loneliness and the unbearable anguish of separation. In this moment of crisis, it is indeed ill – advised to tell – though unfortunately it happens oftentimes – the dying or the bereaved, in case death has already taken place, that there is nothing to worry about, it will be alright in heaven because the 'dear one' has the assurance of salvation. To put it mildly, this is outrageous, and the one who is giving such 'good piece of advice' does not really know what death is, or what it is to be in utter loneliness and anguish. It has been rightly said that no dying person alone can cope with the tragic crisis of death. What is needed therefore is a deep sense of understanding and sympathy on the part of those who are called to minister and comfort the dying or the bereaved ones. Such understanding and sympathy need to manifest in one's presence with them. Often in such moments, silence is more helpful than words. The assurance of a loving company helps the dying to feel – if he is still aware of it – that he is wanted and not just left out to finish off.

The fear and anguish of separation from a hitherto significant relationship with the members of the family and friends cannot be brushed aside by merely exhorting

that we shall meet someday in heaven. That is too simple. The threat of a seemingly absolute separation can be bound by no other than the 'cords of love: Did not St. Paul say, out of a seasoned experience with the Risen Lord, 'who can separate us from the love of Christ?' Nothing! Indeed nothing. But again, that love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts can also become just mere words. What we are asked for is to have a dynamic relationship between us, the dying and the bereaved, nourished in love and concern. This need not start when the person is already dying. It can start much earlier, even as early as when he is healthy. This is where Christian nurture should come alive. A Christian is not only preached to but taught. He should be taught in words, the certainties of life in and through the Risen Lord. This can be done in a Sunday School, or in a Bible study group, or even in a house Church meeting. But a Christian can also be taught the assurance of the Future Hope within the context of a living Christian relationship in brotherly love and concern. Nowadays, this is a far cry in Christian Churches. Christian fellowships have become and are fast becoming impersonal. Love is a very personal force – it cannot grow impersonally. It grows only within a fellowship. And it binds together those who are in fellowship around and with the Living Lord Jesus Christ.

In case relationship like this has not been established in the Christian fellowship, the dying must be made to feel that he is really loved and taken care of with concern. It means real effort on the part of those who have come to share in the suffering and anguish of the family and the dying, to reflect genuine love, which Jesus Christ alone can inspire. The dying and the bereaved should be made to feel that the love of God shown in Jesus Christ would not let them go even in death. The concrete expression of this can be seen and felt in the gathering together of relatives, friends or Church members to stand by the bedside of death or in support

of those left behind, against the invasion of death. Practice like this – which is certainly more than just a formal condolence visit – is much more common in Asian societies than in the West.

In death and dying life is being negated. And the final word for man is despair even if he has all the success and achievement in his lifetime. He stands on the brink of nothingness while fear dominates his last moments of physical existence. What has the Church or the Christian to say about this? Probably, he has not much to say but he can take up the challenge of nothingness by affirming life. And life for him is more than just material existence. It would indeed be a very poor kind of life – in fact one wonders whether it is really life at all – if that is all what we have to it. Yes, life is the gift of God and to affirm God's goodness is to take seriously and appreciate the lasting worth of life, which God has created. It is a life, which God, in His purpose and will, can lead to immortality and resurrection beyond man's mortal limit in death. If we can impress this positive meaning of life on the dying or on those who feel the pangs of the loss of a loved- one, then we have given hope to him who is in despair and in fear.

Lastly, our hope is only in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died, hence experienced the horror of death and dissolution, was buried, but conquered death when he rose from the dead on the third day. To those and for those who share in His death in suffering and death itself, and participate in the victory of His resurrection, are given the glorious hope of the redemption of the body, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. Wherefore, whether a Christian stands by the bedside of pain and death or attends the funeral of a loved- one, the glow of the Spirit of Christ and the deep-seated assurance derived from daily experience of the Risen Lord come to him afresh and radiate from him to those who otherwise could have never known what it is to live a

life in the midst of death, and in the midst of death, a life in expectant Hope.

Let me end with a Prayer of a British NT Scholar William Barclay, in his book *More Prayers for the Plain Man*, p.42. "Help me to do each task, to face each duty, to shoulder each responsibility as it comes to me, so that, if life should end tonight for me, there will be no loose ends, no things half-finished, no tasks undone: through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen."

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