



# THE UNION SEMINARY BULLETIN

Occasional Papers of the Faculty of Union Theological Seminary  
November 2002  
Year One Volume 1

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Of a People's Struggle for Life

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Seminaries and divinity schools have, for years, been described as marketplaces of ideas. Unfortunately, many such institutions have been marketplaces of *Western* ideas. In other words, if one were to go “shopping” in these “malls” of theological education one will find shop after shop, aisle after aisle offering “imported” stuff—from theologies, to liturgies, to models of hermeneutics. We need more “shops” that proudly offer the diversity of Filipino and Asian articulations of faith. This anthology is an attempt at doing just that.

**Revelation E. Velunta**, VOLUME EDITOR

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[Ferdinand Anno, Professor of Liturgics and Church Ministries, presented this essay]

## **DOING WORSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF A PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE FOR LIFE**

*Freedom and Responsibility in Worship*

By Ferdinand Ammang Anno

### **Introduction**

My self-assigned task in this music congress is to present some thoughts on the larger context of our music ministry: the liturgical context as it also locates itself in an even larger context: the worship of God in the world today. Our music ministry ought to be grounded in spatial and historical contexts.

Church Music must be freed to sing the songs of the suffering and struggling people. This is my context: The Filipino people's struggle for life.

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In his latest encyclopedic re-presentation of the Christian Liturgy, Frank Senn, a north American Lutheran liturgiologist, underscored the need for Christian worship to be catholic and evangelical in perspective at all times. 1 These: catholic and evangelical, in the tradition of the Liturgical Renewal Movement he proposed as two criteria that must guide any attempts to liturgical revision.

What do the concern for the universal and the evangelical in liturgical revision mean when set in a context where everyday life becomes the point of encounter between God and human? Specifically, this essay raises the question, what do 'traditioning' and 'evangelization' mean in conflictual social situations -- in the context of people's spirited struggle for a better life ('livable world' in UTS lingo)?

In the liturgical front, this question may possibly lead us to some practical conclusions or appropriations determined by our market driven preferences for entertainment, our cultural tastes, or even our inclination toward the anthropologically correct which is the case in many attempts to worship reforms in various Christian communities.

The following reflection on worship stem from a theological anthropological concern conditioned by the urgency of relating our worship with people's liturgies of struggle without compromising the integrity of the received tradition and without necessarily bowing to the constrictions of ideological correctness. The task of this paper is to approach, theologically, the issue of

freedom in liturgical revision on the basis of our pastoral commitment to the ongoing struggles of the least in society. With this task, the essay wishes to refocus on the theological constitution of worship and its Christological center that would build up into a discussion on the exercise of freedom in liturgical revision. This however is simply an attempt to respond to an expressed need for a theology of liturgical renewal that can hold together, lend validity and integrity to the rules of prayer some Christian communes have so far created and learned to develop and love in the course of their involvement in people's struggles. Moreover, it is an attempt to root these rules of prayer or liturgies already practiced in the modern day catacombs of struggle to fundamental Christian affirmations and the historical multicultural liturgical tradition of the universal church.

### **Retrieving the *Leitourgia* in the Liturgy**

From a radically biblical and theological self-understanding, the liturgy is that life-constructing work shared by God and the worshipping community.<sup>2</sup> The redemptive activity of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit arouses in people a passionate longing for God in and through their 'participation in God's work in Christ for the world'.<sup>3</sup> These two: God's continuing redemptive work and the human's free and active communing response constitute the totality of the liturgical act. To miss this point is to miss entirely the logic of and the actual fact of communion and redemption in liturgy. In practical terms, a de-emphasis of the other reduces the activity into an ego-tripping ritual bordering the capricious and the whimsical. What is total in the liturgy is the fact of a symbiosis of God's work and the people's response where both redemption and communion are actualized.

Communion and redemption are one and the same reality. In the liturgy, the one is realized in the activity of the other. If the historically revelatory exodus event is to proclaim a gospel, it is that the worship of God -- creation's ultimate purpose, and creation's liberation to wholeness are a corresponding reality. Jesus' call to an intimate liturgical communion with God (Mt 11:28-29) is a categorical statement of this unity. Communing with God is a liberating experience of freedom from the yoke of slavery and burdensome existence. In broader theological terms, the reign of God which Jesus Christ inaugurated in his life and ministry, death and resurrection attests to nothing less than the actualization of a redemptive communion in history between God and people. That 'God with people' through Christ the Savior (Mt 1:23:24) -- point to the fact of communion-in-redemption and redemption-in-communion. This is the gospel which the liturgy is called to celebrate, and all liturgies should be measured against this norm.

A related issue is the life-story context of redemption and communion. The theological emphasis in the established liturgical tradition, at least as introduced and appropriated in our churches -- younger churches and former mission fields, is not exhaustive of the full expanse of salvation story. It failed to appreciate that which is referred to as 'those other scenarios' of God's 'love story' with humanity and creation.<sup>4</sup> The expanse of celebration in traditional worship had been exclusive of other salvation stories. Other stories, particularly those of the non-western, non Christian world, of marginalized and fringe groups are consigned simply as some mythic tales of the primitive imagination that have nothing to do with the God of the Bible and the tradition of the Christian church.

Worshippers in the established liturgy are called to celebrate a salvation story which ignores, or at best, excludes their own stories as peoples. What follows as a result is a crisis of cultural dislocation and religious disorientation. Because stories and culture embody one another, the one perishes with the demise of the other. This crisis opens the doorway to peoples' 'spiritual colonization' -- a religio-cultural phenomenon with which the Filipino Christian lived in history and which remains to this day -- a cultural Trojan horse of globalization . What H. Kraemer observed of the younger churches many decades ago as 'still to a large extent, in their structure and style of expression spiritual colonies of the west ' in spite of their self- reliance and increasing self-assertion is hitherto a truism.<sup>5</sup>

While the liturgical movement undoubtedly succeeded in reviving interest in liturgical and ecclesiastical renewal , much of tradition's alienating elements are left unturned. They continue to persist over against the people's agenda of and ongoing work for religious emancipation, and/or their interest in the spiritual dimension of their struggles for authentic peoplehood. The Liturgical Movement may have contributed significantly in the reorientation of the churches on the historicity, the theological substance and the pastoral character of the ministry of worship, but it remains at best, as Marjorie Procter-Smith critiques -- a reorientation to that which is inherited and given by way of restatement of liturgical norms for purposes of reappropriation.<sup>6</sup> The Liturgy in the hands of the Liturgical Movement remains a liturgy 'from above,' that is, a predetermined timeless tradition in search of people-and-their-work (leitourgia) in new spaces.

A liturgy 'from above' while it sincerely maintains and encourage openness to fresh innovations within its conceptual and practical framework of traditioning ( including the recovery of worship as fundamentally a communal act in contrast to the rigid monarchic rubricism of traditional worship),<sup>7</sup> still could not dispel its aura of 'foreign-ness'. From the feel of radically struggling neocolonial subjects, the liturgical tradition remains a

suspicious agency of cultural imperialism. A liturgy "from below" in contrast, and this refers to a people's work in search of liturgy, or specifically, the people's struggle in search of meaning and liturgical spirituality, does not only witness to the here- and-nowness of the reality of God's salvation but also root itself to the kenotic incarnational ministry of Christ which subordinates even the most hallowed tradition to the primordial importance of people's struggle for peoplehood. If the "Galilean" and "Jerusalemite" ministries of Jesus are indeed normative sources of Christian Liturgy, as Von Allmen proposed, then it is only but imperative to reconceive the traditioning process beyond mere appropriation.<sup>8</sup> 'Traditioning ' should be one of reconstruction, expansion and creation; one that is sensitive to the contemporary human situation to the groans of an ailing creation and to the strangest working of the Spirit in the people's continuing quest for selfhood. In Christ this fact is brought to a clearer focus. What could be more surprising than the Christ-act of defying the Sabbath law in favor of the ongoing redemptive communion with people in pursuit of wholeness and selfhood . Apparently, to Jesus, fulfilling the law or participation in the traditioning process on the basis of God's everyday encounter with people includes reconstructing, expanding and creating new traditions.

### **Christian Freedom and Liturgical Creativity: The Law and Gospel in Worship**

LITURGICAL CREATIVITY in worship flows from the new reality of freedom constituted in the once -for -all saving event in Christ. Laws of whatever nature and form constricting the spiritual growth - to- maturity of people are dissolved by the radically new tradition of spiritual freedom. A realization of this Christ -endowed freedom starts from an inward experience of acceptance and redemption from God's wrath to "enjoy rest, quietness and confidence in one's worth before God."<sup>9</sup>

Assured of God's confidence, the Christian then experience not only the inner-ness of spiritual freedom but also its outward working to explore the potentials, expanse and possibilities of spiritual life within and beyond the confines of tradition and even contemporary experience. The freedom of the Christian is rooted in a historical event - the Christ event, that it becomes daring in its ventures with the Spirit of freedom. Fundamental to the gospel of the reformation, the freedom of the Christian...

*includes the boldness to venture, everything that needs to be done. Because Christian have been freedom from all kinds of work, they can dare to do any kind of work...the freedom of the Christian is so radical that nothing but the conscience stands between him/her and a particular kind of work.*<sup>10</sup>

Hence, the creation of new liturgical forms is an exercise of that freedom brought by God through Christ and sustained in the power of the Spirit. It is the Gospel, itself the reason for celebration, which sets free a people's spirituality from the "Laws of the Sabbath"-- the pharisaic convention of all life and religion. What becomes decisive in the Christian cult is no longer the definable God of tradition but the undefinable unfathomable living mystery that is God. In the spirit, the divine mystery could be apprehended or experienced in the "unlawfulness" of liturgical creativity. What is affirmed in this act of creation is not only the freedom of the Christian in the Spirit, but also its very source which is the fundamental truth of God's freedom to be God. In this, Pamela Ann Moeller is very emphatic,

*God is bigger than any particular style or pattern of worship or prayer can manifest. Therefore, if we claim or behave as if there is a normative way to worship, we not only deny human diversity and the variety of human reality, we also attempt to put God in a box by limiting the way we are relate with God and there in the way we expect God to relate with us. Thus "worship" one we have defined rather than the One Who's Is/Will Be, the One who was revealed to engage with human being quite often surprising, abnormal ways.<sup>11</sup>*

Secondly, creativity in worship as the movement of the Holy Spirit in the worshipping human is not bound to the restrictions of temporal and finite institutions. Human institutions stand still before the infinite and absolute freedom of the Spirit to go where it wills, even way past the "given" limits of the human and his capacity for comprehension and self expression.

In the power of the Spirit, tradition becomes not a dead canon, nor a living past reclaiming its place in the present, but a borderless adventure in the time and space, and movemental towards what is creative, historically redeeming and life-giving to people. Thus, as in creation, the Spirit is free to move even into the abysmal frontiers outside the fences of conventions and orthodoxies --even into the abyss people's struggles.

The Filipino people's struggles for peoplehood, being "the people's," is in a state permeated with ambiguities. In the struggle, the sacred is oftentimes confused with the wretched, righteousness seems to veil the sinful, and vice versa. People are caught in an ambiguous cycle of spiritual freedom and political captivity, in the struggle's way of life that is radically fallen. But it is precisely in this state of fallenness that the outcry for God's merciful intervention is heard loudest. It is in and from the abysmal state of struggle that the cry for redemption becomes a genuine longing for an encounter with the divine - a worship par excellence. Hence, liturgical creativity in the people's struggle for peoplehood heightens in people awareness of their

total dependence to, and the all - decisiveness of God's grace. But only the free in Christ, the empowered in the Spirit dares to offer before God the liturgy of the abyss. For as Robin Scroggs in a psychedelic theological pitch would believe what the abyss is -- a dangerous place.

*[the abyss is] a dangerous place, but we should not forget that in ancient symbolism, the waters of chaos were also the waters of creation, out of which the gods and the world came into being... The abyss does say to us, we have no sure abiding home, but it also gives us the challenges to find creative stance which may speak to us and our time.<sup>12</sup>*

In the abyss that is the people's struggles, the movement of freedom becomes a movement of creation, and the act of creation becomes a movement of freedom. God is God even of the abyss, and "where the Spirit of God is, there is always creative freedom." There is great reason to cry, pray, dance and sing in the abyss.

### **Worshipping God in the 'High Places' Beyond Prophetic Liturgy**

In view of its increasing participation and awareness of its leading role in the people's struggles against cultural aggression, the church has rightly focused its attention to the liturgical. Aware of church worship's captivity to Western liturgical culture, Christian in the struggle initially embarked on a method of retrieval and prophetic reinterpretation of tradition. But even this prophetic liturgical rhetoric against cultural imperialism was not enough to spur a cultural renaissance so integral to the pursuit of a more authentic collective existence. So far, what protest liturgy had contributed to the liturgical enterprise is the recovery and revival of the prophetic spirit in the cultic tradition of Judaeo- Christianity. At best, it opened a gateway for a free liturgical journeying along prophetic lines. As its basest though is often the neglect of the prophet's historico-spatial context (--a critique similarly raised in theology in EATWOT circles and clearly pronounced in Asian theologies' critical appraisal of protest theology as not quite going beyond the language of Hebrew prophetism),<sup>13</sup> specifically, the people's 'other' tradition -- the emerging cultural tradition of struggle.

It must be noted however that outside of the church establishment, in many communities of resistance where the agenda of national liberation, self-determination, cultural identity and integrity resound most, people are giving shape to liturgical celebration which are moving beyond the religion and sociopolitics of Hebrew prophetism. Besides retrieval and appropriation

of tradition is the creative adaptation of people's emerging rites, images and symbols.<sup>14</sup> Here, the story of the Filipino people's communing and redemptive encounter with God becomes the liturgy's primary outlining and designing norm. The truth of the incarnation and the whole paschal mystery are translated into concrete stories of people's life - work in the struggle.<sup>15</sup> This, in effect, relocates the struggle into the domain of the sacred. The stories then become the Gospel's, if not a gospel, and therefore, primordial in the people's curriculum of worship.

The above option for the people's story should not be dismissed simply as an ideological rhetoric, neither is it merely an exercise in cultural romanticism, or just a whimsical attempt to syncretization. Rather, it should be viewed, historically, as an incarnation of the Gospel in people's life stories. Historically, the gospel is in a very ambivalent position. Firstly, the Gospel came as part of the colonial cultural package designed to domesticate colonial subjects. Secondly, this 'imposed Gospel' built the ideological edifice that is the church. Thirdly, according to T. Witvlet, '[Christian worship] whatever its potential might be ... has contributed to depriving people of their culture and identity by imposing liturgical forms from outside'<sup>16</sup> or, as emphatically pointed out by E. Miranda-Feliciano, and which I want to quote in full -- "after about (nine) decades of assiduous learning of western ways of doing things, have come to believe the false idea that there is not a better way to worship God than that taught by the missionary." -- a critique shared by the 'cultural redeemers' among the evangelicals which is, by itself, a very interesting development within (the non-NCCP member) evangelical circles.<sup>17</sup>

At one point in the liturgical praxeological spectrum is a small but growing number of Christians who find the Gospel as an insightful, inspiring and empowering companion in their struggle for self-identity, self determination and cultural integrity. They encounter in the Gospel the Christ who enhances to wholeness the people's lived culture, both traditional and emerging for their well-being and total emancipation.<sup>18</sup> While the current in contextual liturgies today focuses more on the accommodation of 'acceptable,' 'neutral' non-Christian rituals, or the reinterpretation of tradition to meet the need for cultural and sociopolitical relevancy, some base and cultural communities are already starting to create new liturgical texts and forms independent of traditional theology and liturgy. Proceeding from this level some go as far as re-reading and re-enacting pre-Christian, post-Christian, extra-biblical/canonical rituals celebrating their life-work stories in the light of the Christian substance.

All these attempts to liturgical contextualization should however be viewed not as mere innovations to quench the worshipper's momentary thirst for

the innovative, the new and different. Rather, this must be viewed more in relation to the people's effort to demolish the religio-spiritual foundation of neocolonial culture and to lay down an identity and culture-affirming /liberating liturgical spirituality so fundamental to the people's struggle for social rebirth. When and if the a liturgical culture acquiesces in and even promotes a social structure repressive of people's basic humanity, the quest for an alternative liturgical culture becomes imperative. A conservative liturgical culture is rejected, to rephrase the more conciliatory words of Christian development workers, 'not because it is wrong, but because it could no hear the people's voice; view their picture; paint their colors; mourn their suffering; and celebrate their victories; 'for as long as it blocks the poor's vision of God and God's redemption of their history.<sup>19</sup>

In the catacombs of people's struggle, the commitment to the promotion of life [or the cause of that life as enshrined in Christ's vision of abundant life] is a norm in liturgical revision. This norm [does it promote life?] also sets the parameters of liturgical creativity. Worship if it is to be truly theo-centric in the strictest Christian senses should take human life seriously because the very God the human wishes to 'enjoys forever' takes life so seriously that in the fullness of time, God, in defiance of theo-logic became flesh and blood in Christ that life may be redeemed to wholeness and abundance (Jn10:10) All laws and tradition however 'theologically correct' they may seem to sound and formally appear are secondary to this primary of the life-norm. Thus, every ritual which takes life seriously and which emphasizes God's communing and redeeming presence in life's very context and/or every ritual which takes very seriously the reality of God with the reality of peoples struggle and the reality of struggle with the reality of God, has a ready ground in the altars of an incarnational Christianity.

Jesus Christ himself, in a culture-bridging conversation with the Samaritan woman, was very clear about worship's freedom from tradition's prescription (Jn 4:19-24), and its basis in the here-and-now(v.23)-- in the fact of redemption that is taking place through God's material presence in Chris. No less than this piece of the Gospel suggest that a liturgical structure that wells from people's stories or concrete historical experience with God approximates the 'truth' and 'spiritual' in worship

Beyond prophetic liturgy are liturgies that bring before God's judgment a struggling people's symbols and images of both cultural and political resistance. They may echo the 'defiled' worship in 'high places' but they are ritual-stories or dramaturgies seeking a place in God's life-redeeming story. Their integrity is not derived from their religious observance of tradition, but from their being the people's life - work and stories. The celebration of the people's politics and culture of struggle, however 'eclectic,' contains 'a truth'

deserving of a place in the Christian liturgical tradition or traditioning process. To discard it as apostatic betrays a poor grasp of the depth and breadth of the meaning of that 'sovereign norm' for the truth and validity of all thoughts about worship.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, the Gospel the liturgy is called to celebrate, had been for a long time unjustly held captive by the liturgical monologue of western Christendom called Christianity. But, as C.S. Song points to clarify,

*What we have done in most cases and at most in confront other culture with Christianity and not with the Gospel, This is methodological error of the first order. The reason is simple, Christianity has been at odds with culture, but the gospel has not always been that way. The Christian church has been opposed to cultures, but the gospel has not allowed that direction necessarily. Christian worship service has alienated cultures, but the gospel has not by definition done so. The Christian way of life has estranged cultures, but the gospel has not axiomatically intended. It is we Christian who have kept cultures at an arm's length, but the gospel has no functioned except in close relationship with churches.<sup>21</sup>*

Beyond prophetic liturgy are strange tongues of the Spirit --praying, dancing, singing and moving with Christ's struggling 'other flocks.'

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3. J.R. Chandran & John Fleming ,eds., East Asia Theological Commission on Worship Report. The South East Asia Journal of Theology , Vol. 4, No.4 (April 1963).pp29-30
4. Choan Seng Song, Third -Eye: Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings( Guilford: LutterwothPress,1970).pp77
- 5.H. Abineno Patterns of Liturgy, The South Asia Journal of Theology. Vol.2,No.2(October 1964),p.66
6. Marjorie Procter-Smith. In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition(Nashville: Abingdon Press) p.20-21
- 7.Though recent reviews of the Liturgical Movement like that Teresa Berger, a Roman Catholic liturgical scholar have attempted to represent the Movement as 'moved' from below in many ways-- by women at the parish level. See Teresa, Women's Way of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History (Minnesota: Liturgical Press,1999),p83
- 8.Von Allmen, Worship: Its Theology and Practice( New York: Oxford University Press,1965),p.26
- 9.Everett Mendoza, The Idea of Christian Freedom: A Legacy of the Reformation(Quezon City: UCCP- CEN,1989),p.4
10. Ibid.,p.5
11. Pamela Ann Moeler, Forum Creating Worship Events, Worship Vol.69,No.1 (January 1995)
- 12.Robin Scroggs, Tradition Freedom and the Abyss, M. Marty,ed., New Theology No.8(New York: MacmillanCo., 1971),p100
13. Choan Seng Song , Living Theology: Birth and Rebirth, Doing Theology with Asian Resources (Programme for Theology and Cultures and Asia,1993),p.11
14. Insights from a dialogue with, or a synthesis of both the cultural historian R.C. Iletto's method of retrieval, decoding and appropriation of tradition and Renato Constatino's interest in the 'emerging' culture are/is helpful in the furtherance of this proposed methodology. See Reynaldo Iletto, The Role of Culture in Transformation: Contrary Reflections, Philippine Society: Reflection on Contemporary Issues ( Manila: Institute of Religion and Culture,1994) and Renato Constantino, Dissent and Counter-Consciousness(Quezon City: Center for National Studies,1971),p.45
15. It is the one Christ event (incarnation-paschal: passion, death and resurrection) as suggested by Aylward Shorter, which is the governing reality in any dialogue between the gospel and the cultures. See Aylward Shorter, Toward A Theology of Inculturation (New York: Orbis Books,1994),p76
16. Theo Witvlet, Liturgy and Liberation, J.C. Davies, ed., A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship (London: SCM Press Ltd.,1986), p.303

17. See Evelyn-Miranda Feliciano, of Songs, and Words and Gestures: Rethinking our Liturgy in the light of Indigenous Art Form, PATMOS ( Manila: ISAAC, Second Quarter 1980).p30  
Ed Lapiz Becoming Filipino Christian,pp122-135 and Filipino Indigenous Liturgy,PATMOS Vol.14  
No.2
18. Ethnotheologians like C. Kraft are very assertive of their position that the human capacity for culture production is 'another of the provision of a loving God for the human well-being' See Charles Kraft, Christianity in Culture (New York: Orbis, Books 1994),p104
19. Ecumenical Center for Development, Rise Up and Build: Communities of Self- Reliance, Participation and Peace( unpublished ECD-CBTP papers),p16
- 20.Paul W. Hoon, Integrity of Worship: Ecumenical and Pastoral Studies in Liturgical Theology(Nashville Abingdon Press,1971)
21. Choan Sen Song, Do This in Memory of Jesus: The Root of the Reformed Heritages, Gospel and Cultures: Reformed Perspectives, Studies from the WARC 35 (Geneva: WARC, 1996),p21

(This sermon was preached at UCCP Ellinwood-Malate Church, Theological Education Sunday, 10 November 2002. *Ed. Note: Apilado served as UTS President from 1990-2005.*)

## **Educating to Love: Why Care?**

By Mariano C. Apilado

### **Introduction**

Some 95 years ago, an example of romantic union took place when Ellinwood Bible School sponsored by the Presbyterian Church and Florence B. Nicholson Seminary of the Methodist Church joined together and so, Union Theological Seminary was born.

The romance continues to provide the main training program and center for pastors and other church workers of The United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. I am pleased, therefore, to invite you all, led by Pastor Ruth, to join with us in the celebration of the 95<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary of UTS on November 18-20 at Dasmaringas, Cavite.

Meanwhile, as basis for this morning's meditation, I want to read from the Gospel of Mark 12:29-31.

The world around us has showcases of the many beneficial wonders of globalization. For instance, it is not unusual for a young professional today to have a Compaq, Toshiba or Acer notebook with Microsoft XP, a Nokia or Samsung handy phone, a Citizen watch, Bally or Jarman shoes, Oleg Cassini shirt, Jologs or Elephant pants, custom-tailored suit, at least five credit cards, equal number of ATM cards and drives a Honda CRV, an MB or a BMW.

Amidst all these signs of the wonders and luxury of globalization, worldwide, 200 million children under five are underweight for lack of food. Fourteen million children die each year for hunger-related diseases. A hundred million children are living or working on the streets. Eight hundred million go to bed hungry at night.

In the Philippines, millions go to the malls, ukay-ukay, wagwagan and other shopping centers to enjoy the blessings of the new divine incarnate. But more live under sub-standard conditions in poverty ghettos, squatter and relocation areas in cities and other centers of population.

Localizing the issue of globalization, the **Philippine Daily Inquirer** in its October 2, 2002 issue reported, "Globalization has allowed 14 importers . . .

to bring in 266 tons of “semi-temperate” vegetables in the first nine months of the year, causing huge losses to farmers in the Cordillera and other areas who produce the same crops.” The imported vegetables are known locally as “Baguio vegetables.”

Globalization has truly brought benefits, but for now, it has given pains, problems, damages and difficulties. And so, to paraphrase Madame Roland of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we cry, “O Globalization, what crimes of exploitation, neglect, greed and inequality have been committed in your name?”

### **What is Our Message?**

Confronted by the challenges and questions of globalization, I often feel like the first year seminarian who came to me and asked, “Sir, what is going on? Before I came here, I had a very strong faith and I knew that my knowledge of the Bible and theology was excellent. Now, my faith has been broken and I am told that what I know about the Bible is either inadequate or totally wrong. What will I do?”

Then I remembered what happened after my very first sermon in my internship year. I remember I preached very well, patterned after Pastor Ely Mapanao and Pastor Eloy Rigos, our preaching professors who were considered also the best young preachers in Metro Manila at that time. I must have impressed the congregation because after the service one of the oldest who was considered also one of the wisest officers of the church came to me with a voice heard by all members, saying, “Thank you very much, Pastor. That was an outstanding sermon. The bible selections were good. The sermon was well organized. Your voice was outstanding. The content was relevant. Your Ilocano is excellent. We expect more of such quality sermons” The others applauded to show their enthusiastic agreement.

And then he took me aside and whispered softly so that no else could hear, “By the way, Pastor, what was your message all about?” That question has haunted me all through these years. In my sermons as pastor and my teachings as a seminary professor, I have consciously tried to be guided by that question. “What is the sermon all about?”

On this Seminary Sunday, therefore, I wish to meditate with you upon the motto of Union Theological Seminary, Preach the Word. The question is, What is the content of preaching? What word are we teaching seminarians to preach? What is our Christian message today?

### **Our Message is Love**

I suggest that the sermon and the Christian message may be summarized in love. I believe love is the key to understanding the biblical message. Love is the key to translating and interpreting the biblical message. Love is the key to understanding our relationship with God. Love is the key to living meaningfully. Love is the key to overcoming our fears, our pains and our confusions as we confront the awesome problems of the world of globalization.

The gospel reading refers to love. Asked what is the first and greatest commandment, Jesus answered, "You shall 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 is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The gospel is all about the wholeness of love for the wholeness of life. Love the Lord your God. This means that love defines what and who is a Christian.

Love with all your heart. Love expresses the passion of life. Love with all your soul. Love expresses the wholeness of life and its future. Love with all your mind. Love is the crowning, the unifying framework of life. Love with all one's strength. All that we do expresses love.

Love your neighbor as yourself. The concrete manifestation and the wholeness of love are ultimately seen in how love is shared, especially by the most loving to the most unloving and undeserving. Love expresses the wholeness of the gospel. This is to say that the sermon is all about love. Preaching is all about love. Christian living is all about love. The definition, the essence and boundless horizons of fulfilling and utilizing our life as stewards of God's boundless and abounding blessings is all about love.

## **I Would Be True**

In 1905, a young man, Howard Arnold Walter, graduated with almost all the honors that Princeton Theological Seminary could award. The following year he went to study and serve in Japan, enrolling at the Waseda University. There, confronted by a non-Christian culture, challenged by conflicting religious beliefs, he wrote a beautiful, inspiring hymn

The first stanza of the hymn reads, "I would be true, for there are those who trust me; I would be pure for there are those who care; I would be strong, for there is much to suffer; I would be brave, for there is much to dare." This is to say, to love is to be true, to love is to be pure, to love is to be strong, to love is to be brave.

The second stanza reads, "I would be friend of all – the foe, the friendless; I would be giving and forget the gift; I would be humble for I know my weakness; I would look up, and laugh and love and lift."

In other words, to love is to be a friend of all, to love is to be giving, to love is to be humble; to love is to look up to God for excellence and idealism, to love is to laugh and to lift. Indeed, there is a place for genuine joy, for merriment and laughter in love and in Christian living.

### **Learning to Love**

My wife, Nellie, is a teacher of early childhood education. She continues to emphasize that children need to be taught the many dimensions of love even while they are still young. She has shared me the thoughtful reminder that "If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient. If a child lives with encouragement, he or learns to have confidence in himself.

"If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate life with all its beauty and variety. If a child lives with fairness, he learns to live fairly and do justly. If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith and overcome problems and difficulties.

"If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself and develop healthy self-esteem. If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to be friendly and understanding.

The beauty and variety of love includes patience, confidence, fairness, justice, faith, self-esteem, friendship and understanding. In other words, to love is to learn to live with the practical situations of common sense in the realities of the ordinary in the community and the church.

Jesus gave a straightforward command, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. When you love one another, the world will know that you are my disciples." (John 13:34-35). One is never too young to learn to love. One is never too old as to be unable to love, nor too old to be unreceptive of love. The time to love and be loved is now. The place to love and be loved is here.

### **Changing Concepts of Love**

A child's changing concept of a father's wisdom and influence illustrates the changing perception of love as a person matures in life. Following is the confession of a child, slightly revised.

When I was four, I loved my father and I thought he could do anything. When I was seven, I loved my father and I thought he knew a lot, a whole lot. When I was eight, I loved my father, but I began to find out that he did not know quite everything.

Then when I was twelve, I still loved my father, but I began to think that he really did not know much. When I was fourteen, I was not sure I still loved my father because I thought he was hopelessly old fashioned. When I was twenty-one, I really doubted whether I loved my father because then I knew he was embarrassingly out of date.

Something began to change about my love for my father when I was twenty-eight, because by then it began to dawn on me that my father did know some things. At thirty, my love for my father did improve and increase, because at that time I thought my father did have sparks of wisdom.

At thirty-five, I knew then that I really loved my father because I felt that before doing anything I needed my father's advice. At fifty, my love for my father made another turn because I shuddered to make a decision without counsel from him

At sixty, I realized my love for my father was genuine, because by then I thought my father literally knew everything. When I was sixty-five, I knew I had not love my father enough and I wished I could have my father to talk to. When I was seventy-five, I felt a certain pain in my heart and a tear fell from my left eye, as and I could only mutter, "Tatay, I do really miss you."

## **Conclusion**

We look around us and we see fears, pain, hardships and difficulties. For all these trying realities and crying questions, the good news is, love, divine love is here. The good news is love unites us. The good news is love liberates us. The good news is love transforms us. The good news is love empowers us.

Love is expressed in the courage to confront the evils, the disparities, the injustices of the world. Indeed, the gospel message is that nothing, not terrorism, not horrors, not pains and difficulties, not the unfaithfulness of some religious leaders, not the corruption of some sectors of society, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." The UCCP Constitution provides in Article II, Section 4, "The fundamental values of love, justice, truth and compassion are at the heart of our witness to the word and our service to the world."

Love is empowered by the uniting together of the resources of the seminary and of the local church to proclaim the gospel of love so that justice, truth, freedom and peace will truly prevail. And so, in the romantic tradition of the union of Florence B. Nicholson Seminary and Ellinwood Bible School to form the Union Theological Seminary, as a fitting commitment to partnership in theological education and ministerial formation, I believe UTS and UCCP EMC should demonstrate the fulfillment of Jesus' comforting and challenging invitation, "Love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.

With pure idealism, undefiled determination, symbolic of the romantic yearnings of our virgin hearts, symbolic of our creative minds and boundless imagination, characteristic of the young, the spirit-filled, the daring newly-born again, as all Christians should be, let us live, translate, preach and share love. This is our firm commitment and solemn resolve so that the world will know and, therefore, believe.

[George O. Buenaventura is Professor of Old Testament. This essay is a biblico-theological reflection.]

## **Jubilee: Freedom and the Land**

By George O. Buenaventura

### **Introduction**

Freedom and Land are two interrelated major themes in the Bible. The Exodus story is a people's travel from bondage to freedom: to a large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey (NKJV); to a spacious land, one which is rich and fertile (GNB); good land, rich with milk and honey CEV); Good and broad land, to a land flowing with milk and honey (NRSV) (Ex. 3:8). Part of God's deliverance of His people from bondage was the promise of a land. God led and sustained them in the wilderness in their way to that land to complete His liberating acts. Jesus showed special concern for the 'people of the land' who were controlled by a foreign (Roman) power. The apocalyptic literatures, which were written in 'difficult and trying' times, share a vision of a 'new heaven and a new earth' (Isaiah 65 and Rev. 21). And this vision was perceived to be realized in the land: coming down from heaven, in the midst of humankind, including animals, plants and the whole environment.

It is repeatedly affirmed in the Bible that freedom and land are both from God and of God. The free God is the owner and giver of land and freedom (Lev. 25:23). Land and freedom are two basic social issues of our time. We wish to relate the two themes in celebration of the Jubilee year in the light of our Biblical faith and in the struggles of the people of our land.

### **Land and Life**

#### **A. Land is Life**

Life, in its fullest sense, is impossible in a landless/territoryless state. The landless Palestinians, who have been struggling for their share in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for almost half a century now hold a placard: "We are Ready for War, Ready to Die". After two weeks of one-sided war in an Israeli controlled but Palestinian dominated territory, almost 100 Palestinians and three Israelis had died. Both are ready to die for the territory. The United Nations, with US abstaining, voted to denounce the calamity.

The Bible tells us of the story when God created the universe. The Yahwist writers tell us that initially, there were no seeds, plants, animals, humans or any sign of life; but land was already there! (Genesis 2:5). The Lord God (Yahweh) took some soil from the ground and formed humans/humankind

(man - ground: admah) v. 7. Then 'out of the ground (also) the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food' (NKJV v. 9). Yahweh created plants out of the ground/soil. Primitive peoples believe/understand that all plants and animals are children of the ground. When it rains, the soil brings forth seedlings which grow into plants; both small and big; and fish from the fields. And then, Yahweh took some soil from the ground (again) and out of the ground He formed all the animals and birds (v. 19).

All living creatures came out of the land. All the things that are necessary for life and living are children of the ground. The land is the source and sustainer of life. Before and after the fall, God told humans to live out of the 'fruits of the ground'. We call the earth 'Mother Earth'. Like a pregnant mother, the ground sustains her helpless children. After birth, as the mother continues to nurse her child, the ground sustains her children also. What amazes us is that the ground can heal herself as she sustains all that came out of her. Too much human intervention constrains the land's capacity to produce, sustain and heal lives. Let it rest (fallow) for a while and you will be surprised for her capacity to produce and sustain more lives.

### **B. The land owns us**

Contrary to what we traditionally know we do not own the land, the land owns us! Filipino folk singer, Rico J. Puno, sings 'Nagmula sa lupa, magbabalik sa lupa, ang buhay mo'y sa lupa nagmula'. We came from the ground and we will return to the ground. Liberal capitalism taught us that we have the right to own a property. We still affirm and uphold this right. But let us never forget that this law on private property was intended to maintain a just social order, and not just to feed the insatiable self. The Lord said, "The land belongs to God, and you are like foreigners who are allowed to make use of it." (Leviticus 25:23) This idea prohibits selling of land on a permanent basis. This principle makes no clan permanently landless.

Jubilee gives all people the opportunity to go back to the land. This celebration avoids perennial nomads and the landless, who are most susceptible to abuse and are helpless victims.

Joey Ayala sings:

Ngunit huwag nating lilimutin, Ang ating pinagmulan;

Tayo ay bunga ng mundo, Anak nitong sanglibutan.

Tayo ay mga puno sa gubat, Ang ugat at sanga'y magkaugnay;

Nakakapit sa lupa, sa lupa, Tungong langit naman sa paglakbay.

### **C. The land creates/shapes culture and traditions**

Indiscriminate land conversions and land use based on global economy are indications of people's insensitivity to their environment/land. Laws of the land, architectural designs, food and work habits, cultures and traditions, seasons of work (planting, harvesting, rest, school, fiesta schedules) are shaped by the land. 'Peoples of the land' were first taught to eat and use the 'fruits of their land' The land sets the normal direction of any given society. We usually celebrate harvest festivals and fiestas after the harvest season, and not vice-versa.

Today, globalization directed people of the underdeveloped countries to produce products which the local people do not consume (example are cash crops to be exported to the first world) instead of letting them produce what they necessarily consume. Rich agricultural lands were converted into industrial estates to produce things for export. This is a misdirection of people who are no longer sensitive to the lessons of the land. The World Trade Organization through IMF-WB and the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade impose laws which benefit first world countries to the expense of the third world societies. People of the land were forced to learn how to produce and consume products, which are not 'fruits of their land'. They were being estranged from their land and at the same time taught to depend on others' produce. Educating Filipinos for jobs to foreign lands further aggravates this estrangement.

### **D. The land is more than a commodity**

The Lord said, "The land shall not be sold on a permanent basis, because you do not own it; it belongs to God, and you are like foreigners who are allowed to make use of it." (Leviticus 25:23) When King Ahab saw that a vineyard in front of the palace was good to be converted into a king's garden (into a golf course, maybe), he summoned the owner (Naboth) and offered to buy it. Naboth said to the King, "I have inherited this vineyard from my ancestors. The Lord forbid that I should let you have it!" (I Kings 21:2)

When the youngest son sold his inheritance (slaves, land and all that can come out from it); the father said, "My youngest son is dead, he is lost." (Luke 15:23, 32) Selling an inherited parcel of land is choosing to be lost and dead. That results in the breaking of family relationship. You did not only sell the land but your fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters! Going back to the land restores that broken relationship. God of the Old and New Testaments takes the side of the dislanded. Naboth and all his heirs to the land were killed, but God heard their cries and called a prophet (Elijah) to show His concern in favor of Naboth and his family. The loving father went

against social conventions to give way for the returning 'lost and dead', disinherited son.

Prophet Isaiah's warning is relevant to us today: "You are in trouble! You take over house after house and field after field, until there is no room left for anyone else in the land... Those large and beautiful homes will be left empty with no one to take care of them. Ten acres of grapevines will produce only six gallons of juice, and five bushels of seed will produce merely a half-bushel of grain (Isaiah 5:8-10). This text precedes the familiar 'Love Song of a Vineyard'. God's fertile vineyard is Israel. It used to be very productive, and produces quality grapes. But because of their unfaithfulness to God, they were compared to a vineyard in a rocky ground bearing bitter grapes. Isaiah clearly sees that the groaning for more real properties at the expense of the poor and needy as the real problem. Prophet Amos, Isaiah's contemporary who prophesied in the North, also sensed the same problem. "You abuse the poor and demand heavy taxes from them. You have built expensive homes, but you won't enjoy them; you have planted vineyards, but you will get no wine. I am the Lord, and I know your terrible sins. You cheat honest people and take bribes; you rob the poor of justice (Amos 5:11, 12). Commodification of all things like land, labor and even human body is an assault to God and creation.

President Manuel Quezon of the Philippine Commonwealth Government in his speech to the First National Assembly of his government in June 16, 1936 said, "The time has come when we should systematically proceed with and bring about the colonization and economic development of Mindanao. A vast and rich territory with its untapped natural resources is a temptation..." This was the start of mass migration of Christian Filipinos from Luzon and Visayas to Muslim Mindanao. This was further felt when, due to the attempt to pacify the Huk rebellion in Central Luzon in the 50's and 60's, the Manila government again gave vast track of lands to the rebels. The 1963 survey of the Senate Committee on National Minorities reported that the "number one problem in Mindanao was land". In 1971, the Philippine Senate committee concluded that: "Through either indifference, insincerity, or lack of foresight, the seeds of discord were sown when the commonwealth government embarked on a policy of bringing settlers from Luzon and Visayas to Mindanao without parallel program of helping the natives legitimize their landholdings or assisting them in making their farms productive. .. There is a mad scramble for the remaining arable lands. The natives are no longer willing to be pushed..." Then in 1974, Then President Marcos opted for the solution to the deep-rooted problem. Thereby bringing Jolo 'flat to the ground'. The present government is prone to repeat the same option. People from Luzon and Visayas through the leadership of the Philippine Government, which has always been dominated by Christian Filipinos failed

to recognize the socio-cultural, religious meaning of the land. We are witnesses of the truth that the perceived solution to the problem became the real problem.

This national phenomena and spirit is a microcosm of the global community. Colonization and neocolonization are rich, strong countries' unjust and uncompassionate action towards the underdeveloped countries. U.S. was silent (abstained) in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but showed its full force against Iraq protect (as if) Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They, as the police of Saudi Arabia gets 40% of oil produced in that land. The US Government and presidential candidates look into the rich Jewish businessmen for national and political interests. Human greed for wealth and power blinds people and constrains them to do justice, compassion and peace.

### **E. Land and freedom are parts of a whole**

The land is the concrete expression of freedom. House renters and land tenants can't make long term developments to other's houses or land. I saw a vast barren land in Bataan. My first question when I saw these was, "Why are these residents leaving in a barren land? Why don't they plant fruit trees or perennial crops?" Residents there said that it was a hacienda owned by someone who was not there. They can't or don't like to plant trees because the land was not theirs. So they just plant vegetables during the rainy season and then bear the heat of summer. They were prohibited to build concrete houses and plant fruit bearing trees. People living on a rented place or on a foreign land can't totally live out freedom. In the same way, people living on their own country but are not free can't enjoy and celebrate life. 'Kay hirap mangibang bayan at mahirap ding maging dayuhan sa sariling bayan.'

Freedom and land constitute a whole. You can't be freely landless or a landed slave. Palestinians are a people without a land. That is why they continue to fight for a territory. They will never stop until they both have land and freedom. When God thought of liberating the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, half of His plan is to lead them out of the foreign land of bondage and the other half is to let them occupy a land of their own. Succeeding in the first half is no success. He will just create nomads who are prone to abuse and marginalization. That is why, to complete the whole plan, God has to do both.

### **III. Jubilee, A Year We all Have to Celebrate and Long For**

Jubilee comes from the word 'yobel' in Hebrew which means 'ram's horn'. Ram's horn is used to signal a celebration. So jubilee means celebration. It's

a celebration of freedom, forgiveness and care for the land, which is done every fifty years. Leviticus 25:10 says, "Blow the trumpet and proclaim freedom to all the inhabitants of the land."

Jubilee is a year of freedom. This is a year where slaves will be freed and allowed to return to their homes. And if slaves were freed, they shall also be given an amount or number of animals for them to start a new life and livelihood. The vision and act of returning/coming back home (shuv) is a dominant motif in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew slaves viewed their trip to freedom as a return to the land that was promised to them (in fact some claim that the Leah tribe was left in Canaan when majority of Jacob's family went down to Egypt to survive the famine). During the Babylonian captivity and exile, going back to the land was their foremost desire (second Isaiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk and Jeremiah). And that was realized in 538 BCE through the initiative of a more humane emperor, Cyrus of Persia. Struggles for freedom and self-determination were strong during the Greek and Roman domination of Israel, even in the time of Jesus. He was called 'king of the Jews'. His statement to "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and give unto God what belongs to God" was understood by the people as a statement prohibiting the Jews from rendering loyalty and taxes to the Roman Emperor (Luke 23:2-3). The Maccabean revolution in 164 BCE and the organization of the armed sect of the Jews, the Zealots, were the people's expressions of their desire for freedom from their own land.

So in the year of Jubilee, owners of the land will return to their lands where they were temporarily estranged due to several reasons. Maybe the land was sold or mortgaged due to extreme necessity (poverty, sickness, bankruptcy in farming or other business, plus interest, etc.) That is why during this year, the 'rightful' owners (by inheritance) will once again occupy the land, live there, making no member of the tribes landless. This will insure land to all. Instead of letting the wealthy and powerful acquire vast parcels of land at will.

Jubilee is also a year of forgiving/canceling debts. Many poor and needy people resort to loans for a living and livelihood. Some could not pay their debts due to unfavorable situations (natural calamities, economic crisis) and exorbitant interest rates on loans. The principal amount loaned could easily be doubled or even tripled due interest. Jubilee therefore, is a year giving others the opportunity to be liberated from unpaid loans and start life anew. Jubilee is a season of going back to the land, home, business and to the environment. Ecological justice is a jubilee issue. The Bible tells us of letting the land take a rest once in seven years and in the fiftieth year. Exodus 23:11 and Leviticus 25:4-7 instruct the Israelites that in the seventh year, let the land have a complete rest (fallow). Do not harvest anything that

grows on it. The poor (widows, orphans, foreigners, and slaves) may eat what naturally grows there and the wild animals can have what is left. This is a time given to the soil to rest, to rejuvenate, to heal itself, to restore its capacity to give and sustain life. On the fiftieth year (7 times 7) human intervention to the land (planting, cultivation) is also prohibited (Leviticus 25:8-12).

Jesus was a carpenter's son. They belonged to the lowest class in their society. They lost their land and therefore have to resort to carpentry. They are very poor and marginalized. The 'sinners' in Jesus' time were the poor landless people who rely on their daily wage. They have to work seven days a week where rest or Sabbath on the seventh day is a luxury. Some lands were lost to grabbers or rich usurers. The sick, disabled people who can't live a normal community life for they were being forced/pressed to the margins of the society. The law of the temple and heavy taxation imposed by the Roman Empire on poor people created the 'sinners'! Jesus' preaching of the kingdom to the poor, teaching (opening their eyes to the truth), empowering people by accepting them to his community of love and healing their illness and diseases, feeding, and casting out demons enabled and brought the outcasts to the new center. The story of casting out demons (legion) from a man in Genesareth is a vivid expression of their hope of freedom from Roman domination. Legion is the main division of the Roman army with 3,000 to 6,000 soldiers. Jesus looks at Israel as demon-possessed, helpless and controlled by foreign power. His presence announced the 'casting-out' of the foreign power, thereby liberating the land.

#### **IV. What is this to us? The Call**

To end this paper, I invite you to struggle with some basic questions Filipinos ask.

1. Is the land ours? When we were forced to plant crops for others? When our rich agricultural lands were indiscriminately converted into non-agricultural (industrial, recreational, residential)? When foreigners own large track of lands and rich Filipinos add land after land, taking advantage of others' poverty? When lots of agricultural-farmer Filipinos were now thrown out of their lands? Don't you think the unending crisis in Mindanao and tribal Filipinos' cry for ancestral domain are issues related to the land?

2. Where are the people who should be enjoying the 'fruits of our land'? Until now, many of our kababayans have to go abroad to look for 'greener pastures'. Professionals and uneducated alike, old and young, and a growing number of women (in fact there are more OFW women today) are going out

of the country as commodities for export. For freedom? How do we feel living in our country where foreigners control the education, the business, the government and even some church missions?

3. How deep is the debt crisis? When our government allocates 40% of the national budget for foreign debt servicing (we are only able to pay interest)? Could you imagine a country operating in a 60% efficiency or maybe less due to graft and corruption? Where shall we go from here? Don't you think we already have paid our foreign debt? The high interest rate had tripled the principal amount of loans we are paying. When can we pay all of these? Do you think we have honestly invested the principal amount for the benefit of the people through efficient government services?

4. What happened to our environment? The western consumerist culture created an unrepairable damage to creation. When more products are needed, faster production rate is required, more powerful and efficient machines were invented, more by-products/wastes were produced, and more garbage were returned back to the ground. The ground deserves rest from human intervention for her to rejuvenate and restore her capacity to recreate and sustain life. But the rate of destruction has been faster than ever! From production to consumption, the ecosystem suffers the most. The desire of the first world, rich countries to maintain their environment (furusato- Japan) and at the same time have to maintain an affluent lifestyle devastated the third world. Are we made to be the dumpsite of other's wastes?

5. Much of the injustice in the world happens because of the people called Christians, who remain silent and who do not resist and say no to oppressive forces in the world. Can the Philippine church be bold enough to say no to militarization, unjust land conversion and use, selling of Philippine lands to foreigners, 'casualization' of labor, unjust labor practices to Filipinos here and abroad, foreign debt servicing, continuous rape of the environment, government's inaction or action against people's claim for land? Or shall we continue to hide in our zones of comfort and remain complicit to oppressive forces?

May the spirit of Jubilee propel us to more responsible and brave actions to make our land a place of shalom! God bless His Church and the World.

[Romy del Rosario, Professor of Contemporary Theology, Ecumenics, and Missions, preached this sermon at Central United Methodist Church on 17 November 2002. *Ed. Note: as of July 2005, Del Rosario is UTS' new president.*]

## **Matthew 25:14-30: The Parable of the Great Surprise**

By Romy del Rosario

As I read the parable that is our text this morning, I found myself sympathizing with the third servant. As I reflected on the passage, I rediscovered the soft spot I have for the underdog--to me portrayed so heartbreakingly by the third servant. Tonight, before you call it a day, please read this parable again and see if you might have a similar experience. In any case, I thought the third servant was a victim of discrimination. Why did the master entrust him with so little and with the least in the first place? Why did the first and second servants receive five and two talents of money respectively as opposed to his one talent of money? Does that sound fair?

When the third servant came back to the master with nothing to show but the original talent of money that was put in his care, he explained that his fear so paralyzed him that he hid the money in the ground. He was afraid that like a good slave driver, as always, the master would harvest where he did not plant and gather crops where he did not scatter seeds. These days we put a prime on honesty, on transparency. So why didn't the master at least give him credit for that--for his transparency? If nothing else, why couldn't he at least be compassionate and understanding? I resented the master for taking away from the third servant the one coin that the master entrusted to him. And why transfer his one coin to the first servant? Didn't that servant already have enough in his care? Now, if we know what a slap on the face looks like, this harsh gesture really qualifies. How does one ever recover from such humiliation, especially after being called wicked and lazy in front of the two other servants?

At this point in my reading, I was already furious. So when I read that the master had the third servant thrown into outer darkness where he had nothing to do but gnash his teeth and weep, I thought I've had enough. If the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven were like this, I probably should think many times about whether I'd like to have any part of it.

But then, after this initial shock, I asked myself, what fairness could I or anyone reasonably expect from a master-servant or master-slave relationship?

Later I read the parable again, and this time I discovered a few more things in it that put in perspective what I had earlier thought and felt.

First, even though the total of coins entrusted to each of the servants differed, from the perspective of the master, they were all equitably entrusted with little.

Secondly, the master knew the trustworthiness of each of the three servants. And he put each one in charge at the level that each could be trusted.

Thirdly, the master was being generous with his trust. Being the master, and with the kind of wealth that he had, he did not have to trust his servants at all with his money, and yet despite the servants' limitations, he did.

Fourthly, the master gave them enough room to maneuver. He left his money with them and gave them license to do with it what they would. He gave them charge of it.

Fifthly, the master's ultimate gift to the servants with whom he was pleased was happiness, his happiness. Some versions say, "his joy" or "his rejoicing".

So, is there a one-on-one analogy between the master and God on the one hand, and the servants and us on the other?

We are all called to interpret this story ourselves, but my own answer to that question is "no". What we have here is a parable, and Jesus uses the power of the parable to reach the poet in each of us, and in that way transform us inside by changing the way we see, the way we think and finally the way we live. On the one hand, the parable suggests not by analogy but by way of its impact upon us what God is like and what God desires for us and for this world, our church and our community. On the other hand, it suggests by way of our reflections who we are or who we have been, how we think and how we act. As is true of all parables, it is calling for change. It is empowering us for change.

I am convinced that the parable is, in fact, pointing beyond the master-slave, master-servant relationship and the story of the talents, to the Good News about God whose gift to us is no less than life, life eternal--yes, and life in all its abundance here and now.

Today, being Thanksgiving Sunday at Central Church, I look again at the parable through an added lens, through and from our context as a church

that is asking especially today not just what it means to celebrate Thanksgiving Sunday, but what it means to be truly grateful. Moreover, we want to be reminded by way of the message of this parable how truly gracious and generous God is to us, and why everyday, every single moment of our lives, not just on Thanksgiving Sunday, we have reasons to praise God and be grateful.

I had a scary experience in October last year. At the end of a brief period of jogging exercise, I felt limp. I could hardly walk or climb the steps. I did not have energy. In the emergency room of the hospital, I was told that I suffered from severe fatigue. A week later, a cardiologist told me that the one thing that spared me from a heart attack was the very exercise that I did each day. I had an athlete's heart. At least that was what the cardiologist said. Just the same, I was advised by the cardiologist to take a leave from work and do nothing but rest for a while. I was weak for weeks and months. And it took me long to really recover my strength.

As I lay in bed, I realized--and yes, for the first time in my life, how frail and fragile life was--even my life. While my initial reaction to the experience was to complain to God for letting me down, my attitude and mood quickly turned into one of gratefulness to God for literally saving my life, to use a deeply rich and comprehensive word. I had never felt so grateful to God as I was during my period of recovery, especially during the first few weeks when I did not even feel like the shadow of myself. Everyday that the sun shone through the window of my apartment, I was grateful. When my colleagues and my students and their children visited me I was thankful. When I first walked out of my apartment, the flowers looked more exquisite. I was thankful. When I heard beautiful music I was grateful.

Now that I am over the crisis, I am afraid I am not as grateful as I was when I was still recovering. Talking about transparency, these days, I tend to take the miracle and beauty of life and health for granted once again.

This, in fact, may be such a familiar anecdote that it should resonate with some of us who were once very grateful people.

How easy it would be to simply moralize at this point and demand that we all count our blessings, gather for a thanksgiving worship service like this and be thankful. But that would be too simple, and I doubt that that kind of call to action would bring about any real change in our lives.

As I read the parable once again, it struck me that:

1. First, God is not an absentee landlord like the master in the story. God never leaves us the way the master leaves his servants or slaves. God is always there for us. So, even as we struggle to decide how to be good stewards of God's resources, God is there struggling with us. God does not reap where God does not sow. On the contrary God is with us from the scattering of the seed to the moment of harvest.

2. Secondly, what the master in the parable entrusts to his servants is truly little compared to what God puts in our care. God entrusts us with the church, the nation, the world, the needy, the sick, our health, our strength, our education, our homes, our family, our friends, our loved ones, our possessions, our faith, our lives. In the new theologies that are emerging in relation to the environment, we are beginning to discover and affirm that while we are stewards of God's creation, creation itself is also a steward of all of us. Nature, the rich and beautiful environment and home that God provides for us would take care of us if only we did not relate to it with so much destructiveness and violence. God entrusts us with a marvelous creation so that it may in turn provide for us.

3. Thirdly, we are not servants or slaves of God especially in the terms depicted in the parable. We are God's children.. All the riches of God is ours, and all that is ours is God's. This, therefore, also means that the happiness that God gives is not the happiness of a slave who remains a slave. It is rather the blessedness of one who is a child of God, and therefore, an heir to all the riches of God. Moreover, it is not happiness that comes only at the end as a reward if ever. It is happiness, blessedness, joy that is meant for us throughout our lives, and undergirds us even during times of scarcity and pain..

The tragedy of our lives is that we think we are entrusted with so little.

The tragedy of our lives is that we are afraid, like the third servant, to give something of ourselves, to part with something that we worked hard to get. The tragedy of our lives is that oftentimes, we are not able to see the graciousness of God. We live in darkness even in broad daylight. In the words of our Muslim sisters and brothers in Java, Indonesia, we are always surrounded and embraced by the goodness of God, but we are as unmoved as "carabaos watching an orchestra" [quote from Melba Padilla Maggay's "Jew to the Jew, Greek to the Greek"].

There is so much to share about my experience serving in the US, and later in Africa, Jerusalem, and Malaysia. But let me just say something briefly about Palestinians that seems to me appropriate to mention at this point.

The Palestinians are a people who have suffered so much. Their conflict is not only with Israel but with countries like the United States that have backed Israel all these years. Israel has also suffered much, and we read about the suffering of Israel. But we rarely read about the suffering of the Palestinians because of the distortions and prejudices of the Western Press. For instance, our press--our television, magazines and newspapers have never shown the hundreds of homes demolished by the Israeli army. But there is a side of the Palestinians that in the end will help them to overcome their suffering and bitterness and enable them to sit down with Israel side by side around a negotiation table and work for a just and peaceful solution to the conflict. It is their sense of gratitude for life and land and their community.

During the weeks of the Gulf War in the early 90's, Palestinians were put under curfew for three weeks with little supply for their daily needs. Women were giving birth in the streets. Pharmacies were closed and people could not get their medicine. Young people were being beaten, killed for sneaking to buy bread. There were some friends from overseas who braved the tense situation and visited among the Palestinians. When asked how they were, they invariably replied: "It is difficult, but Alhamdulillah!" "It is difficult, but glory to God!" And they get on with life trying to be good stewards of their diminishing or virtually lost rights over their homes, their land and their lives. Why aren't they scared? Why aren't they hopeless? I do not want to romanticize the Palestinians. There are indeed a few among them who have resorted to the extremes of violence because of their despair and anger at injustice. But I have learned a lot during the years that I lived among them. They are a people like Filipinos are a people. They laugh at a good joke. They care about their children and their elderly. They love to eat and party. They are a very hospitable people. But most of all, they are hopeful and brave, because they are a grateful people. Grateful people are hopeful. Grateful people are courageous. This is the side of the Palestinians that we do not read about in the press. I can understand why the third servant was not only afraid but also ungrateful for what was put in his charge. After all, how could one be truly grateful in a master-servant or master-slave relationship? But we are, thank God, in a different situation where, as God's children, we do not have to be afraid to be generous. We can be truly grateful.

John Wesley reminds us that only those who are grateful could be generous. It is they who could earn all they could, and be grateful, save all they could, and be grateful, and give all they could, and be grateful.

May God give us the courage to overcome our fears so that we may become truly grateful and truly generous. Amen.

[Antonio Pacudan is Professor of New Testament and Director of UTS's TEE Program. This essay is a biblico-theological reflection.]

## **The Greatest One Among You must be Your Servant**

By Antonio Pacudan

Muhammad Ali once claimed to be the greatest in the world of boxing: Two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, also want to be the greatest in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:35-37). They and many other people in the world want to be the greatest in their field of endeavor. Seemingly, greatness is one of human being's obsessions in life. In fact, this was a very hot issue in the synoptic gospels among the disciples of Jesus. Likewise, it was addressed by the Johannine Gospel. This prompts us to ask, what does Jesus say of greatness in general, meaning in church, society and in the kingdom of God? Jesus, the Greatest Teacher the world has ever had, teaches his disciples about true and genuine greatness. In our text Jesus simply says, "The greatest among you must be your servant" (Matt.23:11 TEV; see also 20:26b; Mk. 10:43b). Besides teaching about greatness, Jesus exemplifies it in his life and ministry. For he "did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people"(Mk. 10:45 TEV).

Remember the Johannine Gospel? It represents to us the symbolic act of foot washing, as sign action of Jesus, which is an act of serving, of literally waiting upon his disciples (John 13:1-17). This means that Jesus acted to abolish the inequality between them (he and his disciples), deliberately revering their social positions and roles. This is an act of subverting in principle all structures of dominion, in which was the desire of the disciples (and other) to dominate one another and establish their superiority over others (Matt. 20:20-28; Matt. 23:1-12; Mk. 9:38-42; Mk. 10:33-37; Lk. 18:14; 22:24-27) (Schneider's 1999: 173). Hence, Jesus inaugurated in his ministry the discipleship of equals-friendship of equality.

Indeed, it is very clear that the teaching of the text we are reading is a redefinition of what true and genuine greatness is all about. Jesus says that rulers of the heathen world have power and authority over other people. For Jesus, this is not the case because the essence of greatness is being a servant of all. True greatness is marked by greatness in servant hood (Mk. 10:35-43).

Jesus has given us an entirely different concept of Christian greatness. Whoever is the servant, is the greatest in the kingdom of God here on earth and that which is yet to be revealed. One is not the greatest who has the

greatest number of servants, but that one is the greatest who serves the largest number of people. In a sense, the only greatness that one should have is the giving of oneself. The deepest principle of Christianity is this, "For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it" (Mk. 8:35 TEV). Lose yourself for the sake of others and you will find your self great in the sight of God.

If this biblical/theological understanding of genuine greatness is correct, I think, every Christian, especially those who are in position of leadership must evaluate their motives in the light of Jesus' teaching on greatness in servant hood. We are not called in the church to rule over others, to dominate the weak and the helpless. Rather, we are called to be servants. This means that we must be instruments to mend and amend people's broken lives, to encourage and build-up the community of faith, continue the ministry of human-divine reconciliation, and further the work of love, peace, justice and righteousness. Jesus summons everybody to obey this injunction, "The greatest among you must be your servant." Let us put on the shoes, boots, gloves of Christian service, for this is how to be great in the life, mission and ministry of God's Church on earth. Let us do the vision of Jesus of an egalitarian Church where discipleship of equals exists, and in an egalitarian Society where there are no rulers but equals, partners in the fulfillment of God's will here on earth.

[Afrie Songco Joye is Professor of Christian Education. Her sermon is based on I Cor 1:10-18 and Matt 4:12-23.]

## **Breaking Down Walls**

By Afrie Songco Joye

We build walls most of the time. Usually invisible, these walls prevent us from communicating and relating to each other with genuine care and meaning. Certain comments and responses from people can rub us the wrong way, and certain beliefs and practices can turn us off. When we cannot stand the other person, distance grows between us, and we build walls. This is true in small-scale relationships as well as in complex relationships, in small and large communities, government and nations. When we put labels on people; we create a dividing wall.

The words for us from the Scripture come from Paul's letter to the church of Corinth. He says: Be one in mind or outlook, purpose, and life. Be united. We are called to have a focused ministry that makes alive the message of God's forgiving, healing love. Our oneness in Christ is already present by virtue of belonging in Christ's family through baptism. Hence, it is not a human creation; it is a given and needs to be realized. We, the people of God, the baptized members of Christ's family, need to break down the dividing walls. The glue that holds us in our common life is Christ.

Paul strongly appeals and literally begs the church members to agree with one another, and to stick together in accomplishing their ministry. But they are bickering, feuding, and thus, divided. Let us visualize the chaos. There were different factions and cliques. Some were saying, "I belong to Paul's group (Paul, founding leader). Others said, "We're Apollos' group." (Apollo was the recent pastor who was intelligent, eloquent, and knew well the Scriptures.) Some others preferred to be followers of Cephas, one of the first leaders and a wise man. So they shouted, "We belong to Cephas." Still others, disregarding the works of the leaders, said, "I am in Christ's group." These people wanted to look to Christ alone for guidance and leadership. They remembered Jesus' promise of his presence and of the "truth setting us free."

In political conventions, for instance, delegates have their open political concerns and agenda slogans. The delegation and the congregation at Corinth may have similar divisive chaotic condition. Each group is wanting in attention and lobbying for their own group's causes.

Walls are built when self-interest becomes the motivating drive. Our ego corrupts the life of the church and its witness. Walls of resentment, hostility, prejudice, sexism, counter-colonialism, ageism must be broken down if we are to be truly the church that is faithful to its task. Whether our oneness is implicit or explicit within our life together depends upon how we relate to each other. Our common life of faith in and love for Christ undergirds a relationship that is characterized by compassion and forgiveness.

To have the same mind does not mean conformity and uniformity, or that the church does not tolerate differences and diversities of opinion. We can be different in beliefs except on the issue of the well-being of the group. Oneness of mind means seeking the interest of the group, an interest rooted in compassion and justice, rather than one's own self interest. To have the same mind is to seek and to do what is best for the group, for our congregation.

Let us reflect on four images to help us visualize what it takes to break down walls (A.S. Joye's *Discerning and Nurturing Life-Affirming Relatedness and Responsible Caring: A Challenge to Religious Christian Education*, pp. 162-163):

1) kaleidoscope - Let us see each person as part of a kaleidoscope with beauty, color, gifst. One is as important as the other. Let us bring out the beauty of the other.

2) rock - Each one has strengths or gifts. We need each other. The community of faith can provide the much-needed caring support. When it is less than caring, it is not living to its purpose. We are each other's rock. Christ is our strongest Rock, our Fortress, our Source of confidence. An Arabian proverb says, "A friend is one to whom one may pour out all the contents of one's heart, chaff and grain together, knowing that the gentlest of hands will take and sift it. Keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away."

3) light- For walls to break down, we need to perceive where the other person or group is coming from. Some people would say to the other, "I know what you're thinking." I feel like responding, "How could you? You may not even know what's going on in your own mind."

Let us walk in the shoes of the other person. Unless we do this, we may not fully understand the other person. We live in private world and private thoughts, which eventually become public. But as a certain poet puts it: "You'll not enter my restless sea- Nor I into yours. I can only collect spangled shells you wash up onto your waiting shore, And try to leave shells for you." Because the Lord is our light and salvation, we don't fear those who try to divide us. We bring light to a world in turmoil.

4) peace bearer, peace maker, peace giver - Let us accept Christ's peace and unity. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." St. Francis of Assisi prays, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love." Yes, walls of resentment, anger, hostilities and differing "isms" can be broken down. Christ has abolished these barriers. A great challenge for us is to advocate for and live out a culture of peace and justice.

We bring light to a fragile, fractious, hostile, broken world.

Let us be one in mind: Make Christ the Head, the One whom we follow.

Let us be one in purpose: Live the way of Christ, who is the way of Love.

Let us be one in life: Be gentle, humble, caring, and just to one another.

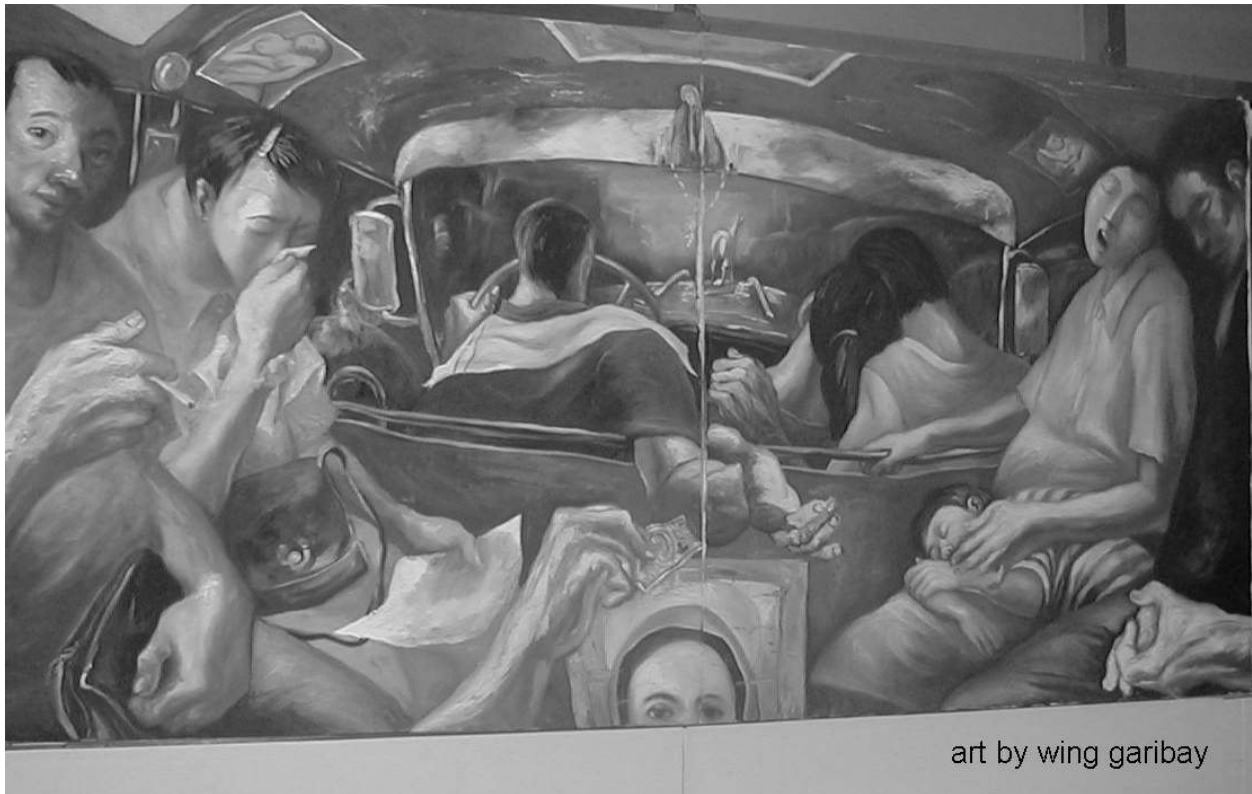
Yes, walls of resentments and hostilities can be broken down. We can be one in Christ. This is possible, if we make Christ our Rock, our Light and our Salvation.

Amen.

[Revelation E. Velunta is Professor of New Testament. This paper was presented at the C.T.E. of the Kapatiran ng mga Manggagawa sa Iglesia (KAMI) of the UCCP's KTKK, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2002.]

## **Reading the Bible inside a Jeepney**

By Revelation Enriquez Velunta



Musa Dube reminds us that, "When it comes to the connection of the Bible, its readers, and its institutions to Western imperialism, there is no call for special pleading. The evidence is overwhelming" (2000:15). Laura Donaldson adds: "What civilization invented the most brutal system of conquest and exploitation the world has ever known? Christian. Who made slavery the basis for capitalist expansion? Christians. What religion has been the most responsible for the genocide of aboriginal peoples? Christianity. In my view the Christian church has a much more substantial record of pure evil than any final good" (7).

Canaan Banana posits that the Bible is an important book of the church and that it includes liberating messages; nevertheless, there remains the sense in which, unless one embraces the Christian concept of God, one is not fully a person of God (Dube, 2000:14). Mary John Mananzan points out that the Bible in spite of all the reinterpretations, remains a book written from a patriarchal, dominator, imperial perspective and thus must be used to inform

and not define Filipino life and struggles (176-177). How then does one do a decolonizing reading of an imperializing text? In other words, "how does one read the Bible without perpetuating the self-serving paradigm of contracting one group as superior to another?" (Dube, 2000:15) How do Asian Christians, particularly Filipinos, "overcome the alienation they feel as they try to relate the biblical world, colonial Christianity, and their own reality"? (Kwok: 42). *I suggest jeepney hermeneutics.*

Most Filipino readings fall within a spectrum: at one end are interpretations that fundamentally mimic European-American exegesis. I have observed over and over again seminary students and pastors lifting out materials from William Barclay's Daily Study Bible series, the multi-volume New Interpreter's Bible, even the devotionals, *Our Daily Bread* and *The Upper Room*, for their sermons and Bible studies. Carlos Abesamis remarks that nothing is the matter with foreigners doing foreign theology (for themselves). The issue is that Filipino theology is a photocopy of Euro-American theology (1997:23,33). At the middle is the more widespread interpretive practice of using local illustrations with foreign, mostly Western, analytical tools and methods. In other words many Filipino readings present data from the local context yet, to echo Tinyiko Maluleke, "its explanatory strategies are seldom, if ever, fashioned out of local practices, beliefs, and cultures" (243). Maryhill School of Theology scholar Ver Miranda, for example, is explicit when he describes his methodology as "socio-literary" and "historical-critical." Maluleke cautions: "There is something wrong when analytical frameworks must almost always be derived from outside"(243). At the other end of the spectrum is jeepney hermeneutics that draws its inspiration from the Filipino practice of "fishing."

"Fishing" is the term that best describes what underpins many Filipino resistance symbols and rituals. Leny Mendoza Strobel points out that the invitation, "Mangisda tayo" (Let's go fishing), aside from the obvious meaning describes the Filipino practice of fishing out words or phrases from a stream of unintelligible discourses and proceeding to weave a relevant narrative that oftentimes have little or no relation to the discourse that produced it. As Nicole Wilkinson puts it: "It is like Jacob wrestling with the angel, in darkness, not knowing whether it is friend or foe, but determined nevertheless to extract a blessing from it."

Isagani Cruz asks of any text, "Whose story is it?" If it is not the Filipinos', then are they able to "fish" out something from it and create their own stories? They are able and they have. On the shores of Mactan stands a monument erected in 1941 by the US commonwealth commemorating Ferdinand Magellan's death. It reads: "On this spot Ferdinand Magellan died on April 27, 1521 wounded in an encounter with the soldiers of Lapulapu,

chief of Mactan Island. One of Magellan's ships, the Victoria, under the command of Juan Sebastian Elcano, sailed from Cebu on May 1, 1521, and anchored at San Lucar de Barrameda on September 6, 1522, thus completing the first circumnavigation of the earth." In 1951, Filipinos "fished" out Lapulapu from that story and created another story, another monument, one they can call their own. This one reads: "Here, on April 27 1521, Lapulapu and his warriors repulsed the Spanish invaders, killing their leader, Ferdinand Magellan. Thus, Lapulapu became the first Filipino to have repelled European aggression."

A jeepney is a "fished" out reading of a jeep. At the end of the Second World War, Americans had a problem: what to do with the surplus of jeeps rotting and rusting at various depots in the Philippines (Nofuente, 1998; Ravenholt, 1962). Thus was born the jeepney. What the Americans thought useless, Filipinos found useful. A jeep's transformation into a jeepney begins when its original intent, its imperializing function, is set aside. First, its machine gun mount is removed. Then, its body is stretched to create more space, to accommodate more people. Today's sixteen or more -seater PUJ (public utility jeep) has more than five times the capacity of the three-seater jeep. Most jeepneys have a radio, an eight-track, a tiny electric fan, photographs pasted on the walls, window drapes, even an altar: a Filipino home on wheels. The jeepney is akin to what Elsa Tamez calls "a house in which there is room for everybody" (205). Valerio Nofuente takes pride in the jeepney's elasticity; there is always room for one more. He notes: "If a child is in the jeep and an adult gets in, he or she is offered a lap (not necessarily a relative's) to sit on in order to make space. If a woman laden with a market basket and a chicken gets in, hands reach out for her basket, and feet are moved aside to find a place for it. The passengers seem to be performing a ritual. They are, as a matter of fact, not facing the direction of their destination, but each other... It is something like the Filipino home. If one arrives while the family is at table, an extra place is immediately laid, and the rice and fish somehow are enough for all, for everyone to adjust his or her intake for the guest." Simply put, in jeepneys Filipinos have created a vehicle of their culture out of a vehicle of war.

Jeepney hermeneutics as a decolonizing reading, thus involves at least three elements. First, it involves reading texts by disregarding, setting aside, or resisting imperial rhetoric, its agents and those who mimic them (getting rid of the machine gun mount). This means privileging the "random aberrant outbursts in a world otherwise rigidly held together by its patriarchal attitudes and androcentric perspective" (Weems:76). This means privileging the subaltern in texts, the rams in Abraham-Isaac discourses, what Leela Gandhi describes as "the ones who disappear because we never hear them speak. They only serve as medium for competing discourses to represent

their claims," like the *pais* in Matthew 8:5-13 (Velunta, 2000) and Onesimus in Philemon.

Filipino activists report that in the mid-70s, at the height of the US-sponsored Martial Law regime of Ferdinand Marcos, "Christ is the Answer" banners flooded Metro Manila. On one of these banners one wrote, in red ink, "What is the Question?" The second element of jeepney hermeneutics involves acknowledging that the answers the Bible provides (like the three-seater jeep) are not enough and may even be wrong for the questions being asked by many communities, thus the need to create space for other texts that help inform—not define—peoples' lives and struggles (therefore, the necessity of the sixteen or more passenger jeepney). Jeepney hermeneutics creates space for other voices, for Filipino "traditions, myths, legends, to harness insights, values and inspiration towards the full flowering of communities and persons" (Mananzan:176-177).

Edicio dela Torre pushes the boundaries of texts. For example, he engages the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-31) in conversation: *What if* the Samaritan arrived on the scene ten minutes earlier while the mugging was still ongoing, would he have helped? *What if* the Samaritan was on the scene even before the mugging started, would he have done anything to stop it from happening? *What if* that road from Jerusalem to Jericho was made safe so that anyone can come and go freely and safely? For Dela Torre, the normative reading of the Samaritan story—and similar stories—beg extrapolation because unchallenged they perpetuates the cycle of institutionalized victimization. Someone is victimized. Someone comes to the rescue of the victim. Nothing is done so that the victimizers stop victimizing, victims stop being victimized, and rescuers stop coming at the end of the victimization. The cycles of violence need to be broken. To read from Dela Torre's perspective is to look at a jeep and the Bible and ask: do these completely address Filipino life and struggles?

Third, jeepney hermeneutics involves "reading like a Canaanite" (Donaldson: 10; Weaver: 169), "re-invading the land" (Guardiola-Saenz), re-claiming stolen spaces, and building homes (jeepneys as vehicles of culture). "The Canaanites are, of course, the much vilified people who occupied the 'promised land' before the arrival of the wandering Israelites. Yet they also stand in for all peoples whose lands have been conquered and expropriated (Donaldson: 12). Filipinos as one of the most colonized peoples in the world (Fernandez, 2001) are modern-day Canaanites. Majority remain squatters in their own land. For the "homeless" Filipino in the Philippines whose bed was last night's cardboard box, tonight's underpass, and tomorrow's park bench, a jeepney ride, though fleeting, is the closest experience of being "at home." Reading the Bible inside a jeepney simply means creating space, offering a

home for “Canaanites” to think, to speak, to sing, to commune in Canaanite languages—in their own tongues.

Jace Weaver argues that Native American peoples, dispossessed of their homeland and annihilated by a foreign invader, emphatically, call for decolonizing the Gospel. Their perception of time, space, and nature, remarkably different from that of the West’s, define their interpretation. For many of them *basileia tou theou* (the realm of God) is read in spatial not temporal terms, asking “Where?” and not “When?” They interpret Moses’ trudging up Sinai as a vision quest. They recognize Mary, the mother of Jesus because she is White Buffalo Calf Woman, or Corn Mother, or La Ilorana refusing to be consoled at the death of her child (169-173). Musimbi Kanyoro points out that “even a ‘women’s reading’ of the Bible does not answer the questions that bother us. In the Martha and Mary stories (Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44), we have found liberation in the affirmation by Jesus of Mary’s desire for knowledge.... But what about Martha? A majority of women in Africa are Marthas” (108). African women ask questions different from those in theological debate in general and in women’s theology in particular. They ask about Orpah’s plight, a question even the Bible does not answer (105). A reading of Romans through the Filipino value of *utang na loob* (debt of the heart) might bear little or no connection to the epistle’s rhetoric, yet it is a reading that creates space for Filipinos (Velunta, 1998).

Those two monuments in Mactan is a testament to the reality that there are several ways to tell a story. There are other ways of reading. No, actually there are legion.

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## **The Future of Theological Education: Roots, Issues and Prospects** By the Faculty of Union Theological Seminary

### **Introduction**

By year 2007, the Union Theological Seminary shall be 100 years old. As part of the celebration of the 95th founding anniversary this year and in preparation for the centennial celebration, the faculty is pleased to present the following paper for study, discussion and refinement as they look towards a theological education that is faithful to its roots and heritage, relevant to the issues in its contemporary context and proactive in terms of prospects and future challenges. This paper is presented to the different publics of theological education with the urgent special request that the alumni, clergy and lay church leaders, colleagues and other stakeholders in theological education give time to study it, after which they may submit their reactions, recommendations and other suggestions to improve upon it for its overall purpose to Support, Strengthen and Sanctify theological education, particularly at Union Theological Seminary.

### **Roots**

1. Theological education is rooted in God's mission. It serves God's mission in the world. Mission is essentially and ultimately the subject and object of all theological education. This entails the equipping of God's people for participation in the mission of Christ and in calling people to participate in the mission of Christ.
2. Theological education is rooted in the incarnation, in Immanuel, God-with-us in the richness, the pain, and diversity of all human capability, longing and struggle as teacher, pastor, servant, lover, prophet, friend, Lord and Savior. Part of this root is a dialogue between the experiences and insights from the past and the emerging issues, needs and challenges of the present towards a future shaped by the resources of both past and present and the "new thing" that God is bringing about. This means rootedness in the hospitality, flexibility, and openness of the risen Christ and the power and freedom of the Spirit to liberate, revise, transform-nay, radically change thinking, attitudes, paradigms, structures and practices that the divine will and vision might be faithfully served and the Reign of God may come upon the earth.

3. Theological education is rooted in scripture, tradition, reason and experience, as well as in the wisdom, insights and experience from outside the Christian faith and tradition. This is to say that it is rooted in the Bible, and in the 21st century, it must also take seriously the challenge of Miriam and Aaron who asked, "Does the Lord speak only through Moses?" (Num 12:2), and thus also proclaim the stories of the marginalized, the subaltern, even the "Canaanites" in the text. The historical-critical methods of interpreting the Bible are valuable, and so are the methods developed by liberationists, feminists, post colonialists, narratologists, structuralists, deconstructionists, postmodernists, social scientists and the methods of those who interpret the Bible through people's stories, chants, paintings, songs, etc The Bible's most un-proclaimed gospel truth: that God and God's activity is bigger than the Bible, bigger than Christianity, and even bigger than Jesus Christ is an essential component of this root.

4. Theological education is rooted in the celebration of life and the commitment to shape and nurture a spirituality that embraces the pastoral and the prophetic, the traditional and the contemporary, as well as the theological and the ecological/anthropological dimensions of the gospel message. This means that it informs liturgy and music

5. Theological education is rooted in struggle - the Filipino struggle to overcome problems of poverty, corruption and crime as Filipinos strive for national pride, self-determination, land, justice and peace. It is also rooted in the struggle and longing of other peoples for the same.

6. Theological education is rooted in the Philippine and Asian history and in the Filipino and Asian peoples' understanding and interpretation of their own history.

7. Theological education is rooted in the indigenous and contextual. This means the Asian and global contexts-in the post-modern world of discovery, diversity and disarray, in globalization's focus upon the Asia-Pacific area, a region of aggressive economic growth, intense religious activity and superficial spirituality. Filipino and Asian theological education is rooted in a decolonizing reading of the Bible that does not perpetuate the self-serving paradigm of imperialist Christianity, that constructs one group-be it race, class, gender, or religion-as superior to another. This means to develop new and creative ways of intertwining faith and culture and the ongoing struggles of the people, especially as these find expression in church structure and polity, administration, liturgy and music.

8. Theological education is rooted in the "oikoumene"-in the importance and meaning of every child, youth and adult, including the aging and the differently able or differently challenged, on the face of the earth and the "liberationist preference" given to those who are marginalized, oppressed or persecuted for whatever reason; in diversity and unity as both and at once God's gifts and challenge to the church, the nation and the world; in the richness and variety of cultures as witness to the generosity and goodness of God; in partnership and dialogue as paradigms of community and nation-building and as instruments of peacemaking, reconciliation and the uplift of the human nobility and spirit; in humanity as part of nature; and the integrity of all creation.

9. Theological education is rooted in the commitment to scriptural holiness, knowledge and competence and the search for unity and integrity within the seminary and in the larger community.

10. Theological education is rooted in the shared wisdom that is in the larger community of theological institutions and the need to take critical cognizance of trends and developments in theological education and ministerial formation in other parts of the world.

11. Theological education is committed to developing church leaders who are imbued with humility, love for the poor and oppressed and committed to democratic governance.

12. Union Theological Seminary is rooted in the commitment of its founders to the evangelical faith, the reconciling grace of God and the hope for eternal life in Jesus Christ-crucified and risen, the movement of the Spirit and the coming Reign of God. It is dedicated to the equipping of the ministry for the unity and development of the Filipino people, the restoration of the created order and abundant life for all, and the healing of broken and hostile relationships among peoples, institutions, the nation and the world. Such education trains seminarians in the practice of the Church's ministry: through the Word, sacrament, Christian Education, worship, church administration, advocacy, pastoral care and the like.

## **Issues**

1. There are often gaps and differences between the seminary's perception of theological education and that of the churches and the denominational decision-makers. This is because by necessity or by force of circumstances the seminary has often taken upon itself the basic tasks of Christian education, nurture and formation, which are the tasks of the church.

.Theological education should start at home and in the church long before a

seminarian enters the seminary for refinement, mentoring and empowerment

2. There is the issue of Christian identity and adjustment and/or accommodation. In engaging in theological education, how does the seminary keep from being so rigid and so rooted in the Christian message as understood in any given period and through particular method/s of interpretation as to stagnate or being so committed to change in the desire to be relevant and responsive as to forget and leave behind its roots and its Christian identity? What Christian identity does theological education espouse? In the postmodern age when the circle of discussion has truly widened as to include the entire oikoumene, how may theological education help the church construct a theology or theologies of mission and strategies in mission?

3. There is also the issue of "cognitive crisis" brought about by postmodernism in which human reason itself is suspect. Thought and perception are more radically conditioned by perspective, circumstances, and interests than rationalism supposed. What kind of impact would this have upon theological education?

4. There is the issue of the relationship of spirituality and professionalism. What does it take to adequately equip the church to look with critical eyes at globalization? How should this be reflected in the theological education offered at the seminary? How are our churches to be prepared to counteract the adverse effects of globalization?

5. There is also the issue of pluralism and diversity. What training would equip the church to live in the context of religious diversity? What is the relationship between dialogue and engagement in mission and evangelism? What is the substance of a theological education that trains seminarians in the task of equipping the churches for dialogue with people of other faiths?

6. Another issue is that of the total concept of Christian Education in relation to the total ministry of the church. Despite the contributions of Christian Education, it has often been perceived as less important than worship and preaching. The work of deaconesses, diaconal ministers and professional Christian educators has not been given priority in terms of program planning, implementation and budget allocation. How may Christian Education be given renewed emphasis within the over-all theological education program offered in the seminary? How may theological education contribute to the development of curriculum resources for use in Christian education in the Philippine churches? How may theological education

participate with the churches in the recruitment and training of Christian educators?

7. There is the issue of interdisciplinary and integrative learning and the search for truth. How can the "arts" in general, for instance, be integrated into the theological education offered in the seminary? Or more specifically, how can the "arts" of the people find expression in theological education and seminary life in a way that could impact the mission and ministry in our churches?

8. How may Christian spirituality, formation, and discipline be integrated into the theological education offered in the seminary so that it could strengthen leadership and discipleship in our churches?

9. How may theological education truly contribute to the search for a structure and polity that would make the churches in the Philippines effective and faithful in participating in God's mission?

10. How can theological education counteract the cultural and spiritual re-colonization of the people through the diffusion of western cultural currents via the music and liturgy in our churches?

11. Gay and lesbians are currently barred from the ordained ministry and are not being given any blessing in their unions or relationships. How may theological education be a catalyst for change in the attitude of the churches in regards this issue? How may theological education be instrumental in making the Christian church more inclusive?

12. How can theological education participate more actively in transforming a global culture of violence? How can theological education teach the larger community to resolve conflicts through just and compassionate means? How may theological education participate in putting an end to patriarchy as a way of organizing male-female relations and distributing social power? How may theological education participate in saving women and children from violence?

## **Prospects**

1. Guided by the dynamic balancing of rootedness and faithfulness, on the one hand, and openness and relevance, on the other, Union Theological Seminary continues to organize its curriculum into three basic areas: Scripture and Interpretation, Christianity and Culture, and Church Ministry and Practical Theology. In the first area, students are assisted in understanding the influence of scripture on the Christian faith and spiritual

life and in developing respect for interpretations of other faiths and religious traditions. In the second area, seminarians are trained to develop critical thinking about the whole gamut of human life in the context of faith through courses in theology, ecumenics and mission, historical and contemporary theologies, church history, ethics, etc. In the third area, seminarians are encouraged, equipped and empowered to integrate theory and practice and the academic and practical as they develop well-balanced attitudes, values, perspectives and skills in embodying and applying theories and academic resources in practical life situations.

2. The main objective of seminary remains practically and essentially what it was in its founding—that is, the formation and transformation of persons for mission as leaders in religious life and critical thinking. This includes church workers, ministers, Christian educators, theological education/seminary professors, deaconesses, teachers, et al. It prepares women and men for service in special ministries among laborers, farmers, fisher folk, urban-city dwellers, families in transition, in school campuses, business offices, hospitals, new housing projects, etc.

3. Non-residential programs, including distance education, theological education by extension, and continuing education for the empowerment of alumni will continue to grow in importance and magnitude. Wherever appropriate, the new information technology, including the internet, will be used to enhance the education of church workers and lay leaders and strengthen the seminary's linkages with them.

4. The seminary commits itself to continue strengthening its present degree programs, namely, Bachelor of Ministry (offered through "TEE"), Bachelor of Theology, Bachelor of Religious Education (major in Christian Education, Early Childhood Education, or Music Education), Master of Divinity, Master of Ministry, and Doctor of Ministry. Responding to the need for advanced training required for research, teaching and leadership in theological schools and seminaries, as well as teaching Bible courses in church-related schools, the seminary will continue to enhance its Master of Theology and Doctor of Philosophy degrees with possible majors in bible/biblical studies, theology, church history, ethics, etc.

5. The churches and seminaries should have an intentional program of selecting those who could be best prepared for leadership posts. Viewing the new occasions, new fields and new challenges the church's mission and ministry, the seminary is also looking for new types of service, leadership and expertise. Scholarship support and other forms of assistance must be raised for the purpose. Thus, the seminary looks forward during the next five years to an increase of full-time resident faculty. At least 50% of them will

be holders of a doctoral degree, equally representing the academic disciplines of Bible and Interpretation, Theology and Culture and Practical Theology and Church Ministries. The ecumenical character of the faculty will reflect the diversity of disciplines, professional experiences, theological perspectives and cultural backgrounds required by the seminary to do its tasks. They will be critical and caring in their commitment, competence, attitude and outlook. Endowed professorial chairs and adequately funded faculty and staff development programs will be put in place.

6. In addition to trained supervisors, coordinators and/or directors for special programs and ministries, like theological education by extension, field education, pastoral care, research and publications, the seminary expects to continue inviting guest professors and other resource personnel.

7. Appropriate staffing patterns and appointments corresponding to a growing seminary, including consultants on finance and resource development, archival work, curriculum upgrading and the like, will be developed.

8. Faculty and staff compensation and incentives that are adequate and competitive will be provided in order to insure that the best-qualified and most competent personnel may be recruited, appointed and supported.

9. The seminary needs to renovate and/or upgrade the existing plants and facilities for administration, student dormitories, housing for married students, classrooms, worship and spiritual formation centers, faculty housing and offices, canteen and library, cum archives, audio-visual facilities and equipment, communication and publishing facilities and equipment. Communication and publication requires computer units for research and networking with the information highway. Appropriate information structures and systems will be established to improve and build up the image of the seminary, church workers and the seminarians preparing to be spiritual leaders. In addition, the seminary requires the following: a medium-size ecumenical retreat and study center with function rooms to house up to 200 people; a multi-purpose three-storey community center to house the bookstore, canteen, business office, meeting rooms, gift shop, museum, alumni office, guest/transient rooms; a communication/information resource and development center for speech laboratory, computer education, text-book writing and production; sports and recreation facilities for a well-rounded theological education and ministerial/pastoral formation.

10. The seminary will maximize utilization of all resources-human resources such as the alumni and natural resources such as the land, in meeting the demands of the coming years.

11. The campus could be turned into an ecological model with sound alternatives for energy, livelihood, water use, and trash/garbage management and transportation services. Through sustainable development, the seminary will be self-reliant.

12. The seminary intends to develop ecumenical networking, exchange programs and partnerships with churches, other seminaries and organizations engaged in ecumenical pursuits and endeavors. The seminary will also strengthen its links with the local churches, and hold more consultations, seminars and workshops among its programs of outreach.

13. Feedback and other monitoring structures and mechanism on issues of spirituality, justice, peace, ecology, dialogue with other living religions, women concerns and other theological issues of struggle, liberation and ethnicity that enrich and strengthen the program of theological education and ministerial formation will be organized and established.

### **Appeal**

The appeal for the future of theological education is captioned SSS-UTS, meaning Support, Strengthen and Sanctify Union Theological Seminary. The UTS faculty believe that they are accountable ultimately to God to whom they must ever be faithful to the level of sanctity and to the church to which they must be relevant and from whom they solicit support and strength. With this understanding of accountability, they now appeal to the representatives of the churches, namely, the leaders, like bishops, district superintendents and/or conference ministers; the local church, namely, the pastors, deaconesses, Christian educators, officers and members; and the world at large, namely, colleagues in education, in social service, in people development, in community organization and allied services to be part of the SSS-UTS.