

DEBO(MI)SYON:

Celebrating the Spirit in / of Baclaran

INTRODUCTION:

As I begin my presentation, allow me then for a more personal elucidation as I am an ardent believer that “theology is biography”. Belonging to the Redemptorist congregation whose very existence can be moored in this motto: “*Evangelizare pauperibus et a pauperibus evangelizari*,”¹ we opt to journey with a people struggling amidst a sea of unmerited suffering. At the same time, we witness the indefatigable spirit of the common *tao*² in their persistent struggle - to live and survive, to hope and believe - for a better future for our children and our children’s children. At present, I live in our Redemptorist community in Baclaran, Parañaque City, Philippines. It is home to the National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help where every Wednesday, the Perpetual Help Novena day, hundreds of thousands of devotees flock as they bring with them through prayers and letters their *daily* life-stories of struggles and pains, of hope and gratitude. Casting our lot on the “othered-others” is not a sign of empty civility or political acuteness, but more importantly, it is a risk of faith and in effect, a theological question. Sneered at by many academicians and professional theologians, the faith-life of “these anonymous crowd” is a valid source for theology and of theological knowledge - the perspective I have embraced and continue to learn to embrace.

My tasks in this presentation, as I understand it, consists in articulating the possible contours of what constitutes the Baclaran story via a *theology* borne out of the enacted “practices” of these multitudes, to use a more biblical term. We shall attempt to grasp Divine sense and meaning via a way of doing theology that offers a different methodological footprint, a different epistemological intuition and in many ways, a

¹ The Latin text can be translated as follows: “To evangelize and be evangelized by the poor”. The phrase invokes the mutual and many times, tensional, dynamics that characterize our relationship with God’s *anawim*. It is inspired by Isaiah 61: 1 and Luke 4: 18. It was the sixennial theme of the Congregation’s 1996 General Chapter inspired by the Puebla Conference.

² The Pilipino word, *tao*, is much richer than its common English translation, “people”. In addition, it connotes a deep respect for one’s dignity, e.g., *Tao po!* “Common *tao*” refers then to the ordinary people and the respect-filled stance one has to take when relating with them.

different field of vision which serve as our wager in unveiling the plausibility of an alternative theological architectonic.

My presentation will be divided into the following:

- I. INTRODUCTION:
- II. POPULAR RELIGION AS “LIVED” RELIGION
POPULAR RELIGION: MIXED REVIEWS
- III. THE BACLARAN STORY: ICON AND IDOL
- V. DEBO(MI)SYON, *UNE MANIÈRE DE FAIRE*
- VI. (NOT A) CONCLUSION: DEFIANT HOPE AND THE BACLARAN SPIRIT

Popular Religion as “Lived” Religion

Jeanette Rodriguez describes popular religion as “home-based, with non-cleric led expressions and celebrations of faith, such as pilgrimages, processions, fiestas, and community created sacred shrines. They are spontaneous and not mandated by the official hierarchy. Although popular religion has its historical roots in 16th-century Catholicism, it has evolved a life of its own that captures the identity, values, and inspirations of the people.”³

Allan Figueroa Deck observes that “popular religion, if accepted at all, remains at the level of folklore. It is something quaint, a remnant of bygone times...”⁴ As the practice of popular religion remains at the level of folklore, it is interchangeably called *folk religiosity*. The concept of *folk religiosity* is first studied in the academic world by German theologians. A Lutheran minister named Paul Drews first coined the term in 1901.⁵ They traced the major roots of this study to what German scholarship has labelled *religiose Volkskunde* which is translated interchangeably as the ‘religious dimension of folk culture or the folk-cultural

³ Jeanette RODRIGUEZ, “Mestiza Spirituality, Community, Ritual and Justice,” in *Theological Studies* 65 (2004), 333.

⁴ Allan Figueroa DECK, “The Spirituality of United States Hispanics,” *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective*, Ed. Banuelas, Arturo, (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 231.

⁵ Western States Folklore Society, “*Toward a Definition of Folk Religion*,” *Western Folklore*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1498248> (accessed Sept 3, 2011).

dimension of religion.’⁶ Usually, it is the combination of indigenous beliefs and the Catholic/Christian teachings, which in many ways could lead to syncretism.

Popular religiosity is the equivalent of the religion of the common people, or popular piety, the way common people live their religion. It is “the set of experiences, belief and rituals which ecclesially and socially peripheral groups create and develop in their search for an access to God and salvation.”⁷ Put simply, it is “lived religion”. It contrasts with official religiosity espoused by specialists and elites. As Robert Schrieter describes,

“Popular religion, (i.e., coming from ordinary people), is often seen as deviation from the official norm of religion... Popular forms of being religious occur not only in Christianity, but in all the translocal forms of religion, such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Each of these traditions has taken a variety of stands within their ranks regarding popular practice and belief, ranging from toleration to periodic waves of reform.”⁸

This brings us then to the reception of popular religion and the way it has been valued and valued in the official ecclesial imagination (or lack of it).

Popular Religion: Mixed Reviews⁹

As Robert Schrieter describes, “popular or lived religion lacks the reflective abstraction of academic theology” but “is more insinuated into concrete practices, ... takes place on the ground, in response to the ebb and flow of history”. The religion of the people has been considered the “other” of elite clerical religion as it has been primarily considered (semi)pagan, superstitious and magical.

The Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (C.E.L.A.M.) in Medellin, 1968 has this to say about people’s religiosity. Following Trent, Medellin considers it primarily as a negative phenomenon - a “semi-pagan” manifestation of an unevangelized culture. There are traces, however, of some positive theological content that includes “stammerings of an authentic

⁶ Western States Folklore Society, “Toward a Definition of Folk Religion,” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1498248> (accessed Sept 3, 2011).

⁷ Orlando ESPIN and Sixto GARCIA, “Lilies of the Field: A Hispanic Theology of Providence and Human Responsibility,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 44 (1989), 73.

⁸ Robert SCHREITER, “Foreword”, *Popular Catholicism in a World Church*, Eds. Bamat, Thomas and Wiest, Jean-Paul, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), vii.

⁹ This sub-section is highly influenced by Vincent Miller’s study. See Vincent J. MILLER, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Society*. New York, NY & London: Continuum, 2003; 2005, 164 ff.

religious sense”. In other words, these theological intuitions are not respected as Christian insights but as mere variants of Justin Martyr’s “seeds of the Word” in the world outside the church. (This is similar to the evaluation of non-Christian religions in Vatican II Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*.)

Paul VI started the slow process of reversal, i.e., turning the pejorative understanding of popular religion into a more nuanced appreciation, by highlighting the necessary importance of culture. In *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, he calls our attention to the erosion of traditional cultures and ways of life because of modernization and industrialization while in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, he appeals for an “evangelization of cultures” in which the gospel would permeate the particularity of given culture rather than being offered as a “thin veneer” that ignores the concrete form of life.

Sancrosanctum Concilium

The Puebla CELAM Conference, 1979, builds on Paul VI’s important insight and advances a more positive evaluation of popular religion as a “legitimate expression of the Catholic faith,” as “people’s Catholicism”. “At its core, the religiosity of the people is a storehouse of values that offers the answers of Christian wisdom to the great questions of life.” It is “capable of fashioning a vital synthesis”.

It is worth noting that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in *The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* # 10, regards popular religiosity as “a universal experience: there is always a religious dimension in the hearts of people, nations, and their collective expressions. All peoples tend to give expression to their totalizing view of the transcendent, their concept of nature, society, and history through cultic means. Such characteristic syntheses are of major spiritual and human importance.”¹⁰ Furthermore, popular piety involves “cultic expressions” which evolve from a “particular nation or people or from their culture”.¹¹ As such, it has rightly been regarded as “a treasure

¹⁰ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, “*The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*,” # 10, 2001, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html (Accessed Sept 7, 2011)<

¹¹ The term “popular piety” designates those diverse cultic expressions of a private or community nature which, in the context of the Christian faith, are inspired predominantly not by the Sacred Liturgy but by forms deriving from a particular nation or people or from their culture. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, “*The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*,” # 9, 2001,

of the people of God” and “manifests a thirst for God known only to the poor and to the humble, rendering them capable of a generosity and of sacrifice to the point of heroism in testifying to the faith while displaying an acute sense of the profound attributes of God: paternity, providence, His constant and loving presence. It also generates interior attitudes otherwise rarely seen to the same degree: patience, an awareness of the Cross in everyday life, detachment, openness to others and devotion.”¹²

Benedict XVI, in his meeting with the members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (with the theme “*The impact of popular piety on the evangelization of Latin America*”) last April 8, 2011 underscores that “[p]rocessions, shrines and other forms of popular piety common to Latin American countries should be encouraged but supported by solid faith and adherence to liturgy. The popular expression of the Catholic faith “is rooted in the very beginning of the evangelization of that land,” and so should be respected but also guided...Properly accompanied, these simple expressions of faith can ‘create a fruitful encounter with God’ as well as increased devotion to the Virgin Mary, the pope and the church itself.”¹³

THE BACLARAN STORY: ICON AND IDOL

The Wednesday devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH) is centered on the Perpetual Help icon. There is a long history (or herstory) associated with the original sacred image now in the Church of St. Alphonsus in Rome. At one point, legend tells us that it was painted by the evangelist, St. Luke. It is actually from Crete of present day Greece. After a Carbon 14 dating process on the wood published in 1992, it is now established that the venerated icon dates back between 1325 and 1480. Documentary evidence shows that it was placed in the Church of San Matteo in Rome in 1499. In

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html (Accessed Sept 7, 2011).

¹² Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, “*The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*,” # 9, 2001, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html (Accessed Sept 7, 2011).

¹³ Today’s Catholic, <http://satodayscatholic.wordpress.com/2011/04/08/pope-says-popular-piety-with-liturgy-key-for-latin-american-church/> (accessed September 24, 2011)

December 1865, Pius IX told the Redemptorist Superior General: “Make her known throughout the world”. The Redemptorists took this seriously and since then propagated the devotion to OMPH.

The Redemptorists brought the icon of OMPH to the Philippines in 1906. Contrary to popular belief, the Perpetual Novena devotion to OMPH did not start in Baclaran but in the Redemptorist church of St. Clement in Ilo-ilo in May 1946 during the war. Irish-American GIs stationed there encouraged the Irish CSsRs in St. Clement to start the novena as they have it in Boston. That same year, the novena was started in Lipa where the CSsRs have a church. In June 23, 1948 at 6:00 PM, Fr. Leo English conducted the first Novena in Baclaran. And as the cliché goes, the rest is history (herstory).

ICON AS ICON

In popular culture, an icon

A pop icon is a celebrity, character, or object whose exposure in pop culture constitutes a defining characteristic of a given society or era. The categorization is usually associated with elements such as longevity, ubiquity, and distinction. Moreover, "pop icon" status is distinguishable from other kinds of notoriety outside of popular culture, such as with historic figures.

Often pop icon status implies distinguished association with a societal ideal or archetype. It is not uncommon for iconic figures to have a nickname or sobriquet that is used to emphasize this association. Sometimes the very name of such individuals is even used as a synonym for common words or ideas.

A number of pop icons are distinguished for having died at a young age. These include James Dean, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, Freddie Mercury, River Phoenix, Jean Harlow, Tupac Shakur, Bruce Lee, Janis Joplin, and Marilyn Monroe among others.

Some pop icons, such as Barney The Dinosaur, Mickey Mouse,[7] Big Bird, Winnie the Pooh, Bugs Bunny,[7] Superman, Spider-Man, Batman, Harry Potter,[8] the Simpsons,[7] and even Sherlock Holmes are fictional characters. Even inanimate objects have been recognized as pop icons.[9][10][11]

Some figures attain transitory or context-specific "pop icon" status for particular events that captivate public attention, such as in the case of the O.J. Simpson trial.

In this highly technological age, there is also a computer *icon*. It is a pictogram usually displayed on a computer screen or mobile device to represent data files or tools on the system. The icon, a small picture or symbol, also serves as an electronic hyperlink or file shortcut which makes file access and navigating a computer system a lot easier.

“If someone asks you to demonstrate your faith to them, bring them to a church and place them before the sacred icons.” **St. John Damascene**

IDOL

Another possible track in understanding popular religion is to consider more explicitly its “production,” the mode in which it is enacted and performed. These enactments and performances characterize popular religion as “living practices” wherein new configurations of meaning and imagination are discerned and made possible.¹⁴

The devotion to our Mother of Perpetual Help provides for a new experience of sociality and relationality. A classmate, officemate or friend introduces the novena to another classmate, officemate or friend as the devotion is shared from person to person. In another level, a new network of solidarity and cooperation is experienced. The kinship structure lost in the urban cityscape is replaced by a different social net of relation and support. Put differently, a devotee who is suffering is lead to another who is also in pain. In the process, *com*-passion as “suffering-with” becomes a lived reality. People are able to slowly break down the isolating walls caused by anguish and tragedy. Praying the novena and writing letters to Mary becomes an occasion for a renewed form of relationality that touches their deepest struggles and concerns. (READ A LETTER)

Moreover, this socio-centric character of the Baclaran experience involves interpersonal relations primarily in the family (many are devotees because their grandparents or parents are) but also in one’s membership in a group, in what it means to be *communitas*. When one prays in shrines like Baclaran, the practice itself is highly personal (and individual) but one cannot ignore the thousands of “warm” bodies praying beside each other. Truth is found not in the “cold logic” of rationality but in a warm dimension of relationality, not in the universal conceptual abstractions but in “particular, concrete sacraments, or symbols; not through observation but ... participation, by kissing the statue, or walking with Jesus, or kneeling alongside Mary, or singing to her”.¹⁵

¹⁴ In theology, “traditions” have always been considered as *loci* of theology. In the dominant theological discourses, however, “traditions” are usually equated with the written text (Council documents, writings of the Fathers and Saints) which in fact illustrates the so-called ‘tyranny of the written text’ characteristic of the Western thinking. We would like to expand the understanding of ‘traditions’ to include the actual faith ‘practices’ and thus retrieve the sense of faith as a lived-witness of the faith-believing community.

¹⁵ Roberto S. GOIZUETA, *Caminemos con Jesús: A Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*, 140 - 141.

Corollary to the above is the empowered experience of the devotee to put a language into his/her predicament. S/He is able to speak and give voice to his/her experience. A devotee is provided the space to articulate his/her joys and pain, hopes and suffering, desires and dreams. Even those who never write letters can be assumed to have been given the opportunity to have their voices heard. The petitionary narratives also allows for stereotypes to be revisited and re-evaluated. Women talk about their husbands and their infidelities; their struggle as mother and wife. In the same way, men pour their heart out to narrate their wives' betrayal and unfaithfulness. Gays, lesbians and transgenders pray for their life-partner. In other words, societal and moral boundaries are crossed to express the people's real situations and desires.

Furthermore, devotees "replotted their lives through their petitions uttered out of hopelessness... [which in turn] brought the insurmountable into focus" bearing with them the desire to triumph over it. In effect, "[p]etitions were a practice in the formation of desire" as they allow for the re-imagining of life and the world differently.¹⁶ At the same time, these supplications are moulded into the "narrative of grace" and gratitude told by other devotees whose pleas have been granted as evident in the many letters of thanksgiving.

In addition, our contemporary Christian liturgical and sacramental practice clothed in a very specific form of rationality valorises only the senses of sight and hearing to promote its own brand of truth. Baclaran devotees clap, touch the saints, kiss the altar, waves to the Icon of our Mother, smell the flowers, lights a candle, etc. What has been forgotten are the other senses (smell, taste and touch) which are integral to the fabric of popular lived religion.¹⁷ In other words, the raw physicality of the ritual gestures can draw surprising attention to the revelatory character of reality and of God. As devotees offer their stories through prayers and letters, what is brought to the discursive theological shrine are the markings / un-markings of the sacraments and sacramentality of what it means to survive, what it means to live. People's religiosity can then be seen as a way of

¹⁶ Vincent J. MILLER, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Society*. New York, NY & London: Continuum, 2003; 2005, 170.

¹⁷ Of course, we are aware of the sensitivity of the question of touch in the present Belgian ecclesial predicament.

touching the sacramental heart so that in that risky behavior of the heart the essence of the life of the sacraments is re-configured.¹⁸

In more ecclesial terms, the Baclaran phenomenon as an expression of people's religiosity bears the traces of theological manoeuvres in the edifice of formal and institutional religion. In the simplicity of their faith and faith-witness, the hundreds of thousands of devotees ultimately contribute to the creation / production of Divine meaning as they negotiate their way in the halls of Christian officialdom. In so doing, it makes possible a real democratization of doing theology and in fact, re-ignite *sensus fidelium*.¹⁹

Popular religious sensibility as noted by Orlando Espin and Sixto Garcia can also be regarded as *sensus fidelium*. It is the "faith-full' intuition" where "Christians sense that something is true or not vis-à-vis the gospel". Popular religion is "a mediation of Christian tradition as important and valid as learned theology and magisterial teaching".²⁰ Thus, it is a source of / for theological knowledge as it retrieves the overlooked or suppressed cultural power of traditional beliefs and symbols and promotes a socialized religious experience. As Robert Schreiter concludes, "popular religion no longer needs to be dismissed as deviation brought by psychological need or lack of proper evangelization. It can be seen as an authentic way of living out the message of the Gospel" as it eludes specialists' attempts to regulate the shape of its own religious and spiritual rendition.²¹ Here, theology is not only a specialized second act reserved for a few experts and connoisseurs. At the same time, it is not only a specific discipline studied in the aulas of great academies like SVST, SATMI or proclaimed in the pulpits of big churches like Baclaran. It is "lived" by the everyday

¹⁸ A significant theological intuition shared by Prof. Dr. Jacques Haers.

¹⁹ "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief." *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

"*Sensus fidelium* literally means 'sense of the faithful'. The term originated with the early Church Fathers, and refers to unerring truth sensed or recognized by the entire body of the faithful - from the *Magisterium* to the last of the laity, according to St. Augustine." Catholic Online, http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=39217 (accessed September 24, 2011).

²⁰ Orlando Espin and Sixto Garcia, "Lilies of the Field: A Hispanic Theology of Providence and Human Responsibility," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 44 (1989).

²¹ Robert SCHREITER, "Foreword", *Popular Catholicism in a World Church*, Eds. Bamat, Thomas and Wiest, Jean-Paul, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), vii.

ordinary people. Put simply, the frequentation of the Other happens in the contours of the people's enactments of what it means to be a Christian.

The abovementioned queries are not only meant to be descriptive. Ultimately, they bear the markings of “performative force and distributive power”. In other words, the Baclaran story becomes a real narrative as “it does what it says” in enacting a different space that permits new perspectives and new actions.²² Truly, it becomes “narrativity in its most *delinquent* form”.²³

Debo(Mi)syon, *une manière de faire*

As a possible ‘way of proceeding,’ what is offered in the discursive theological table is “Debo(Mi)syon: Devotion as Mission-al and Mission as Devotion-al”. Here, we are reminded of what the prophet Ezekiel saw in a “vision” - a chariot with its four cherubim carrying the “glory” of Jehovah flies over the temple and leaves the city (Ezekiel 10 - 11). Contrary to the belief of those citizens spared by the Babylonians that they have become the special elite because they remained inside the sacred walls, the Spirit has in fact left the walled confines.²⁴ It is therefore plausible that the present predicament enjoins all believers to search and go beyond the limits of the supposed religious and institutional ‘sacred walls’. Facing this reality means “interrogat[ing] ourselves and ... open[ing] up an uncertain future,” to borrow de Certeau’s words in a somewhat different context.²⁵

“Devotion, a noun” according to Dictionary.com, means “profound dedication” or even “consecration”. It can also be a “earnest attachment to a particular cause, person, etc.”

²² Michel DE CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 123 and 125. Italics not supplied.

In de Certeau’s view, stories function in two ways, namely, the creation of a theatre of actions; and the marking and transformation of frontiers and bridges. A frontier is a “middle space,” an “in-between - a space between” “composed of interactions and inter-views” which can also be considered as “a sort of a void, a narrative sym-bol of exchanges and encounters”. Following the “logic of ambiguity,” a bridge “opens the inside to its other” as it “alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy”. *Ibid.*, 127; 129 and 128.

²³ Michel DE CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 130. Italics not supplied.

De Certeau further clarifies, “if its specific mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it undoes and displaces, ... then the story is delinquent”. *Ibid.* Italics not supplied.

²⁴ Michel DE CERTEAU, *Culture in the Plural*, 7.

²⁵ Originally, referring to the May Paris Event of 1968, we take the liberty in re-appropriating de Certeau’s words and apply them here. Michel DE CERTEAU, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, 5.

In ecclesiastical use, it pertains to “religious observance or worship” and a “form of prayer or worship”. It is also synonymous with “zeal and ardour,” even “love”.²⁶ In the context of the previous discussion on people’s religiosity and the Baclaran story, we may consider the devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH) as the dedicated “practice” of the Wednesday novena imbued with ardour and love for our Mother Mary and her son, Jesus Christ.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “missional” as “relating to or connected with a religious mission” and is an alternative to the adjective “missionary”. The use of the term *missional* has gained credence at the end of the last century due to Tim Keller, Ed Stetzer, Mike Breen, Alan Hirsch, the Gospel and Our Culture Network, Allelon and others in contradistinction with a select group of “professional” missionaries. It proposes an understanding that all Christians should be involved in the Great Com-*mission* of Jesus Christ. There is in fact a missional movement which is a church renewal movement based on the necessity of missional living by every Christian and the missional nature of the church which in turn flows from *missio Dei*, a term coined by German missiologist Karl Hartenstein in 1934 as a response to Karl Barth’s *action Dei* (action of God). This movement promotes “missional living”: adopting the posture, thinking, behaviours, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the Gospel message. To be missional implies missionary witnessing whether one is in his neighbourhood / hometown or in another country or culture.

Devotion can be highly solipsistic as it can be dangerously self-shaped and self-focused even if it is supposedly directed to an-other - God, Mary or the saints. Devotional practice can be a mere monologue, a narcissistic performance of a spiritual self-talk. In the same vein, mission may cease to be *Missio Dei* as evident in the many historical enactments of a colonizing church. In a world where fundamentalism is rearing its ugly head, mission can be dangerously reduced to a self-serving reduction of an-other to the same. In other words, devotion can be relegated to the personalized I-Thou relation while mission is also cheapened to mean a form of incarnating a domineering and intolerant faith community.

²⁶ “Devotion,” Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/devotion> (accessed September 28, 2012).

DEBO(MI)SYON: Devotion as Mission-al and Mission as Devotion-al, is a dis/position that is akin to a journey, a search that lies *devotion* and *mission*. It is highly *devotion-al* as it is filled with zeal and love. The devout is intensely touched by his/her experience glimpsed through the Icon of God. S/He is “consecrated” to the altar of a man-God whom s/he encounters in his/her narrations of prayerful pleas and heartfelt gratitude. In the same regard, it is *mission-al* in its practiced desire to reach-out and serve others, not in his/her own terms alone but in the service of God’s mission and His/Her Reign. Put differently, devotion without mission is empty self-referential monologue cloaked in a spiritualizing anesthetization (and many times, aesthetization) of the pains and sufferings in the world. In turn, mission not fired-up by devotion becomes a cold and distant following of the God of the philosophers and scholars, not the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob.

In another vein, the dialogue between devotion and mission contributes in the “abolishing [of] the division of human beings into makers and dreamers, activists and introverts, and the differentiation between the productivity of action and the receptivity of piety”.²⁷ In traditional language, it is the meeting of two paths, *via contemplativa* and *via activa*, in a mutual yet at times tensive relation of creativity and freedom.

(NOT A) CONCLUSION: DEFIANT HOPE IN THE INTERSTICES OF BACLARAN

A couple of Christmases ago, I sent a greeting card saying, “... and *defiant Hope* is born”. As I encounter Nanay Eden, Jasmin and Jun, Mang Fidel and the everyday devotees in the Baclaran Shrine, I want to believe that in navigating our present “troubled” and “troubling” world, nothing is more urgently needed than “expressing a disquiet, a hope ... [in] seeking to invent for itself a ‘way of being and believing’”.²⁸ In this journey, we join all the other nameless exiles²⁹ - “the pauper, the *idiotus*, the illiterate, the woman, or the *affectus*

²⁷ Dorothee SÖLLE, *The Silent Cry. Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. Barbara and Martin RUMSCHEIDT (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 200 and 201. Originally published as *Mystik und Widerstand: ‘Du Stilles Geschrei’* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1977).

²⁸ Luce GIARD, *Introduction: How Tomorrow is Already Being Born*, ix.

²⁹ For a meditation on the ‘wanderer-pilgrims’, the (post)modern-day exiles as embodied in the life-journeys of migrants, see Victorino A. CUETO, “‘Out of Place’: Exilic Existence in a HyperGlobalized World,” in *Faith on the Move. Toward a Theology of Migration in Asia*, eds. Fabio BAGGIO & Agnes M. BRAZAL (Quezon City & Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 1 - 19.

...”³⁰ and may we add, the undocumented people, the so-called collateral victims of unjust wars, the street children, the hungry, the persecuted and *Paglaom*³¹ - those that the world has not considered its own. This presentation is but a modest attempt at theological *tinkering* to heed the murmurings of the common *tao* in their struggle to survive and live in the ‘oceanic rumble’ of everyday faith-witness and marginality. In this exploration, there is no conclusion. In its stead will be fear and gratitude, pain and joy, and a heightened passion for life, in the double sense of the word, knowing that the journey will always involve manoeuvres in the most delinquent forms of communities enacting the life of that man-God from Nazareth who continuously ignites the flame of hope... defiant as ever!

The Jesus-Christ Story and the Theology of Everyday Life

From the lens of the everyday, the basic Christological question ceases to be “who is Jesus-Christ?” and becomes “do we encounter the man-God from Nazareth in our day-to-day living?”; “do we meet Him in his day-to-day life?” Corollary to this are the various aspects of the said encounter: Where do we meet the man-God, in the congested and squalid neighbourhood? How does He look like? Or better still, what is His odour like? Does He have the pungent smell of a stinking street child or the sticky passenger in an overcrowded jeepney? Put simply, Jesus-Christ is encountered in the details of daily life, in its concreteness. “Just like my neighbours, relatives, and friends, Jesus also lives in our community. He is someone we could call upon to understand our plight and to give us

³⁰ Michel DE CERTEAU, *The Mystic Fable. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 105. Italics not supplied.

We also remember, both literally and figuratively, the following: Nanay Eden, a battered wife who after thirty years of domestic violence has finally found the courage to say, “Enough!”; mother and child, Jasmin and Jun, who come regularly to offer prayers for husband and father, Jess, a migrant worker in the Middle East; and Mang Fidel, a paralytic who faithfully visits the shrine every Wednesday, rain or shine.

³¹ *Paglaom*, a term common to Bicol, Waray, Cebuano and Ilonggo regions, literally means *hope* in English. It is also the name given to one of the endangered Philippine monkey-eating eagles, the national bird of the Philippines. In the context of our discussion, it also symbolically refers to two inter-related concerns, namely, our common heritage - the planet earth; and the ever *defiant hope* that refuses to succumb to despair amidst the massive suffering and groaning of creation.

hope.”³² This signifies two distinct yet interrelated theological intuitions, namely, the concreteness of an everyday Jesus of Nazareth; and the concreteness of relating Jesus the Christ to the everyday of our own lives.³³

Praxeology and Theology of Everyday Life

between pilgrimage and wandering where a sojourner navigates the in-betweenness of being a *pilgrim*, someone sure of his / her destination and a *wanderer*, someone who allows his / her feet to lead the way and do the walking. In as much as it is about inhabiting particular locations, it is also about moving on. Paradoxically, it is about finding and discovering in the same way that it involves “the way to get lost”, “how not [simply] to return”³⁴ as de Certeau describes it, where one’s faith-beliefs are not bracketed yet at the same time not valorized in a fundamentalist way. In effect, a believer seizes upon, in the heart of every encounter, both human and religious, the very “Presence whom no absences and no new stages of experiences have ever fully spelt out”³⁵. The discourse of a believer is primarily engaged neither in the assertion of truth nor in the promulgation of power, but in the capacity to bear witness to the risks of the *weakness of faith* that “creates a space”. To use Cardinal Walter Kasper’s words, the Christian “risk is not that of the Greek hero Odysseus who returned to his starting-point; Emmanuel Levinas saw him as the paradigm of a self-identical, isolated subjectivity. The risk of truth is the risk of Abraham, who left his homeland to seek a yet unknown land”.³⁶ This implies ‘bearing witness that makes no

³² Luis PEDRAJA, *Jesus is My Uncle: Christology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 25.

Corollary to this, do we even salivate when we anticipate the taste of the Reign of God? Conversely, do we taste the bitterness of God’s Un-reign?

³³ An important theological insight raised by Prof. Dr. Jacques Haers in our electronic conversation.

³⁴ Michel de CERTEAU, *Heterologies. Discourse on the Other*, 80.

³⁵ Michel DE CERTEAU, *Culture and Spiritual Experience*, 12.

³⁶ Walter KASPER, “Magisterium’s Interventions in Philosophical Matters,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 28 April 1999, 5. See also ID., *Reflections on the Holy Father’s Encyclical Fides et Ratio II: Magisterium’s Interventions in Philosophical Matters* (April 1999).

claims for itself' and is 'free' to take risks which it shares'.³⁷ Consequently, Christianity is humble. In fact, Christian identity is made humble and is then called to nurture a "humble/d theology and spirituality"³⁸ which kneels before and is "seduced by an impregnable origin or end called God"³⁹.

Put differently, a believer seizes upon, in the heart of every encounter, both human and religious, the very "Presence whom no absences and no new stages of experiences have ever fully spelt out"⁴⁰.

Theology of the everyday pleads for a re-configuration of *praxis*: from an instrumental category for social transformation as developed by liberation theology to a basis for understanding aesthetic experience as an important category for interpreting human action.⁴¹ Ethical-political praxis as an inter-personal action is not directed towards socio-political emancipation *alone* but aims at a hopeful transformation of every aspect of lived existence, be it communal, familial or individual.⁴² Moreover, theological aesthetics is not elevated to aesthetization in order to anesthetize the pains and sufferings in the world. "[T]he aesthetic is not at the expense of the ethical or even rational" but "mediated by the ethical-political": the aesthetic component of praxis is "encountered and lived-out within ethical-political action, as the deepest meaning and significance" of the latter in everyday living.⁴³ In this regard, solidarity with the poor involves not only the political struggle for

³⁷ Michel DE CERTEAU, *Faiblesse de croire* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1987), 128. See also Walter KASPER, "Magisterium's Interventions in Philosophical Matters," 5; and ID., *Reflections on the Holy Father's Encyclical Fides et Ratio II: Magisterium's Interventions in Philosophical Matters*.

³⁸ On a more personal note, I have been grappling with this particular issue as an Asian. Although the Philippines is a predominantly Christian country, we continue to be confronted on a day-to-day basis by the different ancient religious traditions and new local ones, e.g., Philippine Independent Church commonly known as Aglipays, Iglesia ni Kristo and Rizalistas among others.

³⁹ Michel DE CERTEAU, *The Mystic Fable. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 299.

⁴⁰ Michel DE CERTEAU, *Culture and Spiritual Experience*, 12.

⁴¹ Ruy G. Suárez RIVERO, "U.S. Latino/a Theology: A View from the Outside," 243 - 244.

⁴² Ruy G. Suárez RIVERO, "U.S. Latino/a Theology: A View from the Outside," 244.

⁴³ Roberto S. GOIZUETA, *Caminemos con Jesús: A Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (New York: Orbis, 1995), 128.

justice and integrity of creation (the public domain) but also the radical transformation in one's interpersonal relationships (the private domain).

In a another vein, this emphatic enunciation of the aesthetics and ethical, mystical and political in everyday life contributes in the “abolishing [of] the division of human beings into makers and dreamers, activists and introverts, and the differentiation between the productivity of action and the receptivity of piety”.⁴⁴ In traditional language, it is the meeting of two paths, *via contemplativa* and *via activa*, in a mutual yet at times tensive relation of creativity and freedom.

The resisting character evident in the terrains of daily living via the *tactic*-like manoeuvres and clever tricks indicate an “operation of diversion” to any technologies or strategies of domination. Put differently, “[i]t is from everyday life that transformations emerge” and consequently, it is the task of theology to partake in this dynamic vocation of radical engagement *in* and *for* the world.⁴⁵ What we do not need are theological strategies too impervious to come to grips with the vicissitudes of everyday life.

⁴⁴ Dorothee SÖLLE, *The Silent Cry. Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. Barbara and Martin RUMSCHEIDT (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 200 and 201. Originally published as *Mystik und Widerstand: 'Du Stilles Geschrei'* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1977).

⁴⁵ Ruy G. Suárez RIVERO, “U.S. Latino/a Theology: A View from the Outside,” 246.