

Towards A Filipino Theology

Until recently no professor in any of the schools of theology in the Philippines dared to speak of, much less try to develop, *ex professo*, a "Filipino Theology". When Fr. Leonardo Mercado, S.V.D., came up with his book, *Elements of Filipino Theology*,¹ a reviewer vigorously protested that there is no such thing as a "Filipino Theology."²

All the while, however, Filipino Theology has been in the making. We can even say that Theology in the Philippine context began in the sixteenth century when the first Spanish missionaries started evangelizing the archipelago. They and their successors for many years to come did not think of themselves as theologians, but even then, they performed an important theological function. They had to decide how to adapt Christian doctrine and practice to the life-style of their converts. They also had to determine what changes the natives had to undergo so that they could really be said to have accepted Christianity while retaining much of their own culture.

To the credit of the early Spanish missionaries we must say that they tried their best to indigenize the Christian faith they introduced to these islands. We should be thankful to them for

¹ Leonardo N. Mercado, S.V.D., *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City, Divine Word University Publications, 1975).

² Quintin M. Garcia, O.P., "Is There A Filipino Theology?" *Unitas*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (March 1977), pp. 101-106.

teaching our people in the native languages, preserving and enriching these in the process; for being sensitive to the religious sentiments of the people and taking these into account by coming up with new forms of popular worship like the "Misa de Gallo", the "Panunuluyan" and the "Pasion"; for being perceptive enough to recognize in the Filipino penchant for celebrating and feasting an opportunity to bring religion to local social life, and so the "fiestas" in honor of patron saints took shape. These, and similar pastoral practices encouraged by the early missionaries laid the groundwork for Philippine Theology.³

But somehow, somewhere, indigenization stopped or was hopelessly retarded until our own times revived interest in it.⁴ In fact it has been enlarged to become a concern for "contextual theology" which comprises the relationship of the Christian faith

³ Theologians taught in the Philippines soon after the missionaries converted the natives but their manner of theologizing (except for the effort of expressing the Christian faith in the native languages) does not fall under the concept of Filipino Theology as understood in this paper. Those who wish to be informed on this matter may read the article of Fr. Pablo Fernandez, O.P., "Theology — Apologetics, Asceticism, Moral Writings" (History of the Church in the Philippines, Chapter 47), in: *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 58, No. 539, August 1974, pp. 522-529. It is worthy to note that some theologians wrote in the Philippine languages and dialects like Fr. Alejandro Lopez, S.J. (+ 1655), who wrote an Apologia for Christianity in the *Lutava* dialect of southern Mindanao; Fr. Cristobal Jimenez, S.J. (+ 1628) and Fr. Francisco Enzinas, S.J., (+ 1632) who authored guides for Confession in *Visayan*; Fr. Miguel Bonet, O.P., (+ 1902) who wrote essays in the *Gaddang* dialect of the Cagayan valley; Fr. Jose Ma. Ruiz, O.P. (+ 1911) who wrote more than 200 sermons in the *Pangasinan* dialect. In general, however, the theologians wrote in Spanish or Latin. — For information on Catechetical works, sermons and pastoral letters, see the article by the same author in the same publication, Vol. 58, No. 540 (October 1974), pp. 677-685. As early as 1581 a catechism in *Tagalog* composed by Fray Juan de Plasencia, O.F.M., was officially recognized by the Synod of Manila as the official catechism for missionaries. In 1593 the Dominicans of Binondo, Manila, established the first printing press in the Philippines and the first two books printed were catechisms, one a bilingual catechism in Tagalog and Spanish, the other in Chinese and Spanish. The first *Ibanag* (Cagayan valley dialect) catechism was written in 1583 by an Augustinian, Fray Juan de Montoya; another Augustinian missionary, Fray Alonso Jimenez, wrote the first catechism in Bikol. — For devotional writings, see the *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 58, No. 540 (September 1974), pp. 611-619.

⁴ The principal church documents are the following:
Vatican II:

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) 13, 16, 17.

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Modern World) 53-62.

to secularity, technology, the struggle for human justice and similar problems that now deeply affect our culture.⁵

Before proceeding further, let me make clear that when I use the term "Filipino Theology" or something similar, I do not wish to imply that the content of our Christian faith as Filipinos is different from the faith professed by the Catholic Church, or that it is something derived from our culture *independently* from the traditional sources of the Christian faith.

Undeniably, however, we must seek an understanding of our faith using our Filipino patterns of thought, forged by age-old traditions and enriched by modern contacts; we have to draw from our own insights provoked by events of our past and present history touching the very core of our lives. If, at the beginning of our faith, it was enough to borrow foreign categories, we must, as we grow to maturity, make this faith really our own. Certainly we cannot do this by throwing around it a *cordon sanitaire* of borrowed concepts and practices. We can achieve maturity in faith only when we let it permeate all the areas of our human lives, be it social, economic, political or religious, and let it attract,

Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) 37-40.

Ad Gentes (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity) 3, 9, 11, 22.

Pope Paul VI.

"*Evangelii Nuntiandi*" (Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World), *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas*, Vol. 50 No. 561 (August 1976) pp. 533-586.

Synod of Bishop 1974:

"Declaration of the Synodal Fathers", *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas*, Vol. 58, No. 543 (December 1974) pp. 840-846.

Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences:

"Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences" (Taipei, April 22-27, 1974), *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas* Vol. 48, No. 539 (August 1974) pp. 498-505.

Philippine Hierarchy (CBCP):

"On Evangelization and Development" (Pastoral Letter), *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas*, Vol. 57, No. 529 (September 1973) pp. 520-546.

"Ang Mahal na Birhen" (Pastoral Letter on Mary in Philippine Life Today), *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas*, Vol. 49, No. 547 (April-May 1975), pp. 256-291

⁵ For the term, "Contextual Theology" see Douglas J. Elwood, ed., *What Asian Christians are Thinking, A Theological Source Book* (Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 1976) p. 48. See also: Ted Gresh, M.M., "Ministry and Mission: From Roland Allen to the Present," *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas*, Vol. 50, No. 558 (May 1976) p. 328-334 and No. 559 (June 1976) p. 398-410.

like a magnet, all the elements of Filipino culture compatible with it, and repel or purify what it cannot tolerate. This is one of the tasks that Filipino Theology must undertake.⁶

Furthermore, we must make our Christian faith relevant to the questions raised by our life-situation as Filipinos. Such questions may not be raised elsewhere, or if other people in other places are asking similar questions, or have asked them in the past, the undertones and connotations are not exactly the same. When Christians in the Philippines try to give their own answers to these questions, they are building up Filipino Theology. Some would call this "doing Theology."⁷

For example, should the Church get involved in politics? In many western countries this question is not even raised today because it was answered long ago. But could we, in the Philippines today, just rely on the answers given in the past in other countries? Is our situation today — a period of transition from martial law to a parliamentary form of democratic government — exactly the same as their situation a hundred or two hundred years ago? Or if we shift to modern times, could we in the Philippines just import a political theology from China or Africa or Latin America? There are clear signs that the results of such importation would be disastrous. It is our duty to develop our own Filipino political theology.

Filipino Theology therefore, is simply Christian faith seeking to find expression in Filipino culture or absorbing from this culture age-old elements of natural revelation and religion, purifying them if necessary from deviations and misuse that paganism

⁶ On understanding as the first task of an indigenous theology see: Dr. John Mbiti, "On African Theology", *Worldview* (August 1973) pp. 33-39. For the making of an Asian or Filipino Theology see: Carlos H. Abesamis, S.J., "Reflections on the task of the Asian Theologian", *Philippine Priests' Forum*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (March 1975) pp. 74-77; Stephen Bevans, S.V.D., "The Subject as an Indigenous Theologian", *Philippine Priests' Forum*, Vol. 7 No. 2 (June 1975) pp. 51-56; "Indigenization: A Fad or a Need? (Editorial), *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 49, No. 551 (September 1975), p. 578.

⁷ See Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975); Carlos H. Abesamis, S.J., "Total Salvation: Key to Understanding the Mission of the Church in Asia Today," *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 49, No. 545 (February 1975) pp. 137-142; Wilfrid Harrington, O.P., "The Unthinkable," *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 49, No. 552 (October 1975), p. 694-699.

and popular superstitions may have fostered, but also being open to an enrichment that it may not have obtained from any other culture past or present. Moreover, Filipino Theology is Christian faith seeking greater understanding and maturity by becoming aware of the contemporary Philippine context, and trying to answer the questions being raised by the Philippine situation. The answers should not just be borrowed from the authority or experience of others but should be the fruit of the Gospel principles that have taken root and grown in the Philippine culture.

To move closer towards a Filipino Theology we must theologize in at least three areas:

1. The Filipino expression of Christian faith.
2. Christian purification and enrichment of, or borrowings from Filipino culture (Theological material in Filipino culture).
3. Questions put to Christian faith by the Social, Economic and Political situation of the Philippines. (Theology in the contemporary Philippine context).

I shall leave the third area to other speakers and limit this paper to the first two areas.

I

THE FILIPINO EXPRESSION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

1. *Problems raised by Bible Translations*

In 1968, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) decided to work together with the Philippine Bible Society (an inter-faith group) to make the Bible easily available in "Common language" translations. Today, ten years later, six translations have been finished: Tagalog, Cebuano, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Pangasinan, and Samarenyo. Two more will soon be finished: Bikol and Pampango. The New Testament in the first six languages has been published and widely circulated. Unfor-

tunately, there have been snags in the publication of the Old Testament.⁸

Previous to these translation projects, the whole Bible had been translated into Tagalog and Cebuano, but the language used was not the "common language" familiar to people going about their day-to-day affairs.⁹ There are many innovations in the new translations and, since they are being circulated widely, they will certainly have an impact in the life of the Philippine Church.

How sound are these innovations? It will take time for us to make a full assessment, but here are some observations that may help in the task of evaluation.

My examples will be drawn from the Tagalog translation¹⁰ the one I am most familiar with.

Previous Tagalog translations made by Catholics¹¹ used the word "binyag" to designate baptism. It is the traditionally accepted word to signify the sacrament of Baptism. However, our separated brethren in the translation committee, objected to the use of this word in the Bible on two grounds. First, it would too closely indentify biblical baptism with the Christian sacrament of Baptism, and perhaps even with the Catholic rituals and practices of Baptism. They were afraid that this sacramental and even Catholic coloring would affect biblical texts that do not really speak of Christian sacramental baptism, as when John the Baptist says, in Matthew 3:11, "I baptize you with water for repentance..."

Secondly, it is objected that the Tagalog word "binyag", though signifying initiation, does not specify that this initiation would be performed by a washing. Those familiar with Filipino

⁸ See Msgr. Mario Baltazar, O.P., "Philippine Report to the World Assembly of Catholic Biblicists (Malta, 1978)" in: *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 52, No. 585-586, Aug.-Sept. 1978 p. 496.

⁹ For the meaning of "common language" and "Common Bible" see the notice on "Maayong Balita Alang Kanimó" in: *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 48, No. 535 (March 1974), p. 209.

¹⁰ Philippine Bible Society, *Mabuting Balita para sa ating Panahon*, (Tagalog Popular Version, New Testament). Manila, 1973.

¹¹ Juan T. Trinidad, S.J., and committee headed by Juan M. H. Ledesma, S.J., *Ang Bagong Tipan ng ating Mananakop at Panginoong Jesu-crísto*, (Manila, Sacred Heart Publications, 1952); Mons. Jose C. Abriol, *Ang Banal na Biblia*, (Pasay City, St. Paul Publications, 1968).

culture know that when children see one of their companions new shoes, they would like to perform a "binyag" on the shoes — meaning to say, they want to acknowledge that it is being used for the first time — by stepping lightly on it, an act causing much displeasure in the owner of the new shoes.

In the new Tagalog Popular Version, baptism is rendered as "bautismo", a loan-word from Spanish. "To baptize is rendered as "bautismuhan". If an objector would say that "binyag", being an indigenous word, is preferable to a loan word, one can counter by saying that the borrowing of foreign words has been sanctioned by no less than the Philippine Institute of National Language (Surian ng Wikang Pambansa) on April 1, 1976, and this policy was circularized by the Department of Education and Culture on June 30, 1976.¹²

The change from "binyag" to "bautismo" raises a question of biblical exegesis. Granted that John the Baptist did not preach Christian baptism, does it follow that Matthew, writing about John's preaching, did not have Christian baptism in mind? If he did have, then we can justify the use of "binyag" fully aware that in the mind of the Tagalog reader it would call forth images of Christian sacramental baptism.

For me, what tips the balance in favor of "bautismo" rather than "binyag" is the fact that in the Bible, the texts about baptism emphasize washing rather than initiation. This, however, is something that ordinary Filipinos will not appreciate until they are familiarized with recent progress in biblical studies.

Metanoein is rendered by two words in the Popular Tagalog Version, "pagsisihan at talikdan", in an attempt to be more faithful to the biblical concept of repentance: a turning away from sin and a turning to God. In the old translations, it was felt that one word was enough, "pagsisihan". But this Tagalog word only stands for remorse, which is not always salvific, as when the bible said that Judas was filled with remorse for having betrayed Jesus (Matthew 27:3).

"Faith" was invariably translated in the Trinidad-Ledesma and Abriol translations as "pananampalataya" (belief). In the

¹² Alfonso O. Santiago and Norma G. Tiangco, *Makabagong Balarilang Pilipino*, (Manila, Rex Book Store, 1977) pp. 28-34.

Tagalog Popular version it is sometimes still translated as *pananampalataya* (see Romans 1:5.17 etc.) but more often as "*pananalig*" (trust), specially when the text speaks of faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 3:22-26; Mt. 8:10; 17:20, etc.).

Dikaïosyne (justice) was always translated by Trinidad-Ledesma as "*katarungan*". Abriol, while using this term in Romans 1:17 and 3:5, etc., uses the term "*kabanalang dulot ng Diyos*" ("holiness that comes from God") in Romans 3:21.25.26; 10:3, etc. The Tagalog Popular version introduces the use of the term, "*pagpapawalang-sala ng Diyos*" (God-making-man-sinless): see, for example, Romans 1:17; 3:21; 10:3, etc. This is certainly more faithful to the biblical concept.

More examples can be cited, but those above are sufficient to show that:

1. The Philippine languages have the capacity of adequately expressing biblical thought, with a minimum of loan words.
2. We need an on-going effort by theologians and linguists to render biblical thought into correct and precise Filipino words.¹³
3. The Common Bible translations produced by Catholics and Protestants challenge the Filipinos who read them to update themselves with the biblical movement.

2. *Liturgical translations*

Ten of the indigenous languages in the Philippines have been approved by the CBCP as official for the liturgy.¹⁴ When Rome tried to reduce these to Pilipino, in addition to English and Spanish — the languages taught in our schools — our Bishops reacted with the stand that, even though our vernaculars are not taught in our schools except Pilipino, the major languages that have been approved should continue the work of translation, so that our

¹³ See G. Waterman, "Translation of Theological Terms into Major Philippine Dialects," P. Gowing-W. Scott (eds.), *Acculturation in the Philippines* (Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 1971), pp. 33-42.

¹⁴ See Camilo J. Marivoet, CICM, "Liturgical Renewal in the Philippine Church, Accomplishments and Persistent Problems," in *The Liturgical Information Bulletin of the Philippines*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January-February 1978), p. 16.

people can take part in the liturgy in a language they understand and speak and feel with.¹⁵

Undeniably, the multiplicity of the Filipino languages and dialects have been an obstacle to the quick implementation of the liturgical reforms. A leading liturgist in the Philippines has said: "Many of our approved vernaculars lack an accepted terminology for theological, biblical and liturgical concepts. Some of them are not very stable, in the sense that there are many variants from region to region, so that a term accepted in one part of the language area may be unknown or has another meaning in another part; hence endless discussions..."¹⁶.

As a small example we can mention the debate on the correct translation of the words of the eucharistic consecration in the Tagalog Missal. The words in question, in English, are: "This is the cup of my Blood... it will be shed for you and for all men..." The translators from the northern Tagalog region wanted to render "to shed" (latin "effundetur") with the word *ibububo* but the translators from the southern Tagalog region wanted to use *ibubuhos*. It was no small matter, because the second word, for the northern Tagalogs, means to spill something *by accident*, whereas for the southern Tagalogs, it is the first word which signifies this. The matter was solved only when the northern Tagalog speakers gave way to the southern Tagalogs, recognizing that many of their people have gone to school and would be familiar with the official Tagalog or Pilipino language, and would mentally eliminate the derogatory meaning which unschooled people would attached to *ibubuhos*.

Continuing, Fr. Marivoet says that "For some languages we do not have the necessary experts, familiar with both the language and/or the correct theological-biblical-liturgical terms..."

Furthermore: "For the vernacular translations that have seen the light of day in much pain and effort, and for which the authors are to be congratulated, not everybody is satisfied with the results. It can be said that almost all of the translations are too literal. The Instruction on Translations of 1969 gives a lot of leeway, at

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

least outside essential forms, but almost none of the translators has used this freedom, so that translations are stilted and do not sound like real vernacular texts. Some translators familiar with the Instruction saw their work undone by censors who wanted a very literal rendering. Then, in the process of translation, there was often little consultation, whereas, according to the wise rules provided by Rome, each diocese where a given vernacular is spoken should have been consulted and the remarks taken into account."¹⁷

These remarks by one of our leading liturgists show that Filipino theologians are just beginning to come to grips with concrete Filipino problems in areas as basic to Christian faith as Liturgy. We have quite a number of priests who have specialized in Theology, but few of them are able to contribute significantly to the adequate expression of Christian faith in vernacular liturgies.

The problem goes deeper when we realize that few have been bold enough to use the freedom given by Rome for liturgical translations. They need to be prodded by the people who see that the present language of the vernacular liturgy "does not have the tone and feeling of their own prayers, and they do not identify much with it. They want the language of the liturgy to be direct, true to life, simple yet flowery and a bit poetic, as our people are. Our youth especially is getting more and more alienated from the liturgy, particularly in the urbanized regions of the country, and this is of grave concern to many pastors."¹⁸

3. *Towards a Filipino Liturgy*

The Filipino expression of Christian faith should normally be most evident in the Liturgy. Sad to say, this is not the case because "historical circumstances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries conspired against the adaptation of the Rome rite to the Filipino culture."¹⁹ The Council of Trent entrusted the regulation of the liturgy to the Pope alone; the Chinese rites controversy "created a climate of reserve, not to say hostility, to indigenous rituals and traditions;" Francis Xavier in Japan made the mistake

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 23-24.

¹⁹ See Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B., *Towards a Filipino Liturgy*, (Manila, Benedictine Abbey, 1976), p. 78.

of finding himself sponsoring the cause of a Buddhist deity because he uncritically used the Japanese word for God, and so missionaries in the Philippines became wary of adapting native words to Christian usage.

In some ways, however, the Filipino spirit managed to have a little say. In building churches patterned after the Spanish baroque, Filipino artisans managed to be "more playful, exuberant and spontaneous than its archetype in architectural style." Filipino religiosity also added its own frills to the Holy Mass. "An hour before the Mass a band of musicians went around the town to invite the people to church. During the Mass an amateur chamber orchestra accompanied the polyphonic choir, and at the consecration the elevation of the host was hailed by fireworks, church-bells and the jubilant playing of the Spanish (or Philippine) anthem."²⁰

That was before Vatican II. Now that the Council has done away with baroque and opted for the "noble simplicity" of the original roman liturgy, has the Filipino flair ceased to manifest itself? No. Rondallas or singing groups with guitars perform in at least one Mass in many churches. Mass on solemn occasions are marked with a sumptuous display of fresh fruits, flowers, sweets, and other festive signs.

Nonetheless the most profound values of Filipino culture, especially those expressed in folklore, still escape the language and ritual of the reformed liturgy in the Philippines, which continues to be unmistakably, even almost purely, roman.

Most Filipinos will certainly object against abolishing the Roman Mass in the Philippines. But some would like to see, co-existing with it, a Filipino Mass, at least for special occasions.²¹

It is just such a Mass that Father Chupungco submitted to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines, and they sent it

²⁰ Ibid., p. 82.

²¹ Ibid., p. 83. See also: Anonymous, *Toward a Filipino Ideology* (Quezon City, R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1972), p. 39; Edgar Saguinsin, "Towards a Progressive Liturgy", *Philippine Priests' Forum*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 18-22.

to Rome for approval. Up to now, however, we are still awaiting Rome's answer.²²

In planning the "misa ng Bayang Pilipino", Fr. Chupungco drew from the Filipino folk liturgies. These were partly the outcome of the missionary attempt to indigenize Christian worship without touching the Mass and the Sacrament. "While the West inserted popular beliefs and rituals (mostly of pagan origin) into the sacraments themselves (e.g., salt in baptism, slapping in confirmation, etc.) or placed them in the category of 'sacramentals', the Filipino took no pains to incorporate their native customs to the official cult of the Church. Thus, a clear line was drawn between the 'folk liturgies' performed outside the Church edifice and without the ministry of a priest, and the 'official liturgy' which has an air of being foreign and unintelligible to many Filipinos. They went to Church for the Mass and the sacrament, but their interest as a community was focused on their heritage, the folk liturgies, which they greatly valued and faithfully preserved through the centuries. Perhaps it can be said that the folk liturgies, more than the official liturgy, kept the Christian faith of the Filipinos burning during the last four centuries."²³

4. *How far can we go?*

For many biblical and liturgical concepts it is just a matter of time and diligent research before we can come up with suitable

²² The Pilipino and the English texts can be read in: Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B., *Towards a Filipino Liturgy*. (Manila, 1976, pp. 96-118; 119-139). See: "Misa ng Bayang Pilipino" (Editorial), *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 50, No. 561 (August 1976), p. 530. For similar attempts at indigenizing the sacraments of Baptism and Marriage, and elevating folk liturgies like the *Panunuluyan* and the *Pabasa* into officially recognized para-liturgical celebrations, see: *Liturgical Information Bulletin of the Philippines*, IX (March-April 1974), 38-60; IX (May-June 1974) 62-80; Maryhill School of Theology, *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 49, No. 548 (June 1975), pp. 382-394; No. 550 (August 1975), pp. 542-551.

²³ See Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B., "Folklore and Christian Worship" in: *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 47, No. 524 (March 1973), pp. 166-167; Vicente Marasigan, "Grassroots Ascetical Renewal", *Philippine*

indigenous equivalents. But we must face the fact that there are some elements for which the indigenous counterparts would be utterly inadequate or inappropriate. Just to take a few examples, ought we and need we look for Filipino ways of expressing the biblical title, "Lamb of God," and of substituting the Cross as the symbol of Christ's redemptive death, and the eucharistic wine as the sacrament of his blood? These are biblical and liturgical elements tied up with the historical character of our faith, which rests on "what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for (our) eternal salvation." (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, n. 19).

The title, "Lamb of God" designates Jesus Christ as the lamb of expiation (Leviticus 14), the Suffering Servant of Yahweh whom Yahweh burdened "with the sins of all of us... like a lamb that is led to the slaughter-house..." (Isaiah 53:6-7), or as the lamb taking the place of the old passover lamb (I Corinthians 5:7). All this is lost when Jesus Christ is no longer called "Lamb of God" but is instead identified with an indigenous sacrificial animal. Are we ready and willing to sustain such a loss? Will we ever be able to make up for it after taking it away?

Crucifixion is not an indigenous form of punishment. Need we then, for the sake of indigenization, change the story of Christ's Passion and death and teach that he was put to death, say, by drowning or by being speared? This would be carrying out indigenization to a ridiculous extent. Common sense counsels us to keep the historical record straight but, for those who really cannot appreciate its implications, we can add illustrations taken from local practices.

Suppose grape wine becomes practically impossible to obtain for a long period of time, can we, for the eucharistic wine, use a local substitute like *tuba* or *duhat* beverage? If we do so, would our celebration still be a *memorial* of what Jesus did the night he was betrayed?

Philippine pastoral praxis is not yet really faced by such questions, but there are stirrings in their direction.

Priests' Forum, Vol. 7 No. 1 (March 1975), pp. 92-95 and "Popular Piety in Rural Luzon", *Philippine Priests' Forum*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June 1977), pp. 23-27.

II

THEOLOGICAL MATERIAL IN FILIPINO CULTURE

After noting that "the sainted Fathers of the Church firmly proclaim that what was not taken up by Christ was not healed," the Second Vatican Council proceeded to say that "What he took up was our entire human nature such as it is found among us in our misery and poverty, though without our sin." (Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 3). The Council was not so explicit in saying that Christ also took human culture to himself to heal it, but this truth can be legitimately deduced from its statement, since culture is bound up with "human nature as it is found among us".

Christ acted and thought as a Jew of his time. He imbibed the contemporary Jewish culture, which was the result of Israel's long history from Abraham through Moses, the Charismatics, the Kings, the Prophets, the Wise Men, to the Pharisees and Sadducees of his own time, which was marked by Roman rule. Even this culture which carried within it the purifying force of positive divine revelation, needed healing, as evidenced by Christ's many corrections of the customs and teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Church, the Body of Christ, has, through the ages, continued the work of Christ to take up and heal human nature as it is found in the various cultures of the world. It might be helpful to note at this point that healing is possible only when the body being healed has the resources to get well. Similarly, when we speak of Christ or the Church healing human culture, we must accept the fact that human culture even before being touched by the Church's missionary activity, has already the materials that can build up Christian faith. This point of view has been expressed in at least four documents of the Second Vatican Council (see note 4).

Gaudium et Spes says that "Before (the Word of God) became flesh in order to save all things and to sum them up in Himself, 'He was in the world, already as 'the true light that enlightens every man' John 1:9-10)." (par. 57). "God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself to His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to dif-

ferent ages." (par. 58). *Ad Gentes* acknowledges that "truth and grace are to be found among the nations as a sort of secret presence of God." (par. 9).

One paragraph of *Ad Gentes* even goes so far as to say: "From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, (young Churches) *borrow* all those things which contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Savior's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life." (par. 22; underscoring mine. See also *Lumen Gentium* 13). It is further said in this document that, after proper theological investigation of the culture of the people being evangelized, (or after the light of the tradition of the universal church has been brought to bear on the cultures entering into contact with the Church), "a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to sacred Scripture, and which have been unfolded by the Church Fathers and the teaching authority of the Church." (par. 22).

Faith will be called upon to purify the philosophy and wisdom of the cultures being evangelized but once purified, such philosophy and wisdom is expected to *enrich* faith with new understanding, that is to say, they will give new rise to an *indigenous theology*: "A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation" (Ibid.) This Theology will be a *contextual theology* because "avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life." (Ibid.)

Here now are a few examples of how faith is called upon to purify Filipino philosophy and wisdom and how the purified product can give rise to Filipino Theology.

GOD AND SPIRITS

Islam introduced monotheism to tribes in the southern Philippines, but the Filipinos untouched by Islam knew, at best, a henotheistic form of worship. For the Tagalogs the one god above others was *Bathala* (a name borrowed from Sanskrit and means noble Lord, great Lord). To establish that he was the creator,

he was also called *Ang Lumikha* or *Ang Maylikha*, and *Maykapal*. Creation, however, was not conceived to be *ex nihilo* but from pre-existing material, in much the same way as it was thought of by the Yahwist who wrote Genesis 2:5-25.

Accepted pastoral practice in the Philippines avoids referring to God as *Bathala*. The preferred name is the borrowed Spanish word "Dios" sometimes spelled the Tagalog way as "Diyos". This is the common usage in Tagalog Bibles and in the Liturgy. As far as I know, there is only one exception, namely, in the liturgical introduction to the Our Father, and in this case it is used as an adjective: "*Sa tagubilin ng mga nakagagaling na utos at turo ng MABATHALANG aral...*" (Instructed by salutary precepts and taught by DIVINE teaching...) This care in avoiding the name *Bathala* signifies the elevation of Filipino religion from henotheism to monotheism. Yet the elevation has to be more thoroughgoing. In the Filipino popular mind, too much power is still attributed to spiritual beings which, according to Christian faith, should be totally subject not only to God but to our Lord Jesus Christ (see Colossians 1:15-16; Ephesians 1:10.21; etc.). Evil spirits are feared as though they have powers that God or Jesus Christ can not control.

Following the traditional Christian usage of addressing God or Jesus Christ as "Lord", Tagalog liturgical texts liberally use the title "Panginoon" or "Poon" (less frequently except in poems and songs). This is another indication of the shift from henotheism to monotheism. The name "Bathala" is dropped because of its henotheistic connotations, but its original meaning, "Lord", expressed in other words as a title. The other early Filipino titles for God like *Maykapal* are unhesitatingly used today in Christian liturgical texts.

"Bathala" was not only a title but a proper name, for in Filipino writings we find not only "ang Bathala" (with the generic article) but also "si Bathala" (with the personal article). So, while monotheism gains by its elimination, inter-personal relationship with God suffers. It might not be prudent to work for the restoration of "Bathala" as God's name in the Philippines but we should take note that the Filipino thinking about God is closer to ancient biblical theology (which gave God the proper name "Yah-

weh") than the western theology which made God nameless. A practical solution to this problem, which in fact Filipinos have unconsciously accepted, is to think of God as Jesus Christ. It should not surprise us that Filipino Theology would turn out to be more Christocentric than Theocentric.

MORALITY

It has been noted by several authors²⁴ that Filipino moral life is governed by a shame culture rather than a guilt culture. This would seem to diminish the Filipino perception of individual and collective moral responsibility. It would explain, too, why his judgment fails to separate voluntary transgressions from involuntary failings: the word *kasalanan* can stand for both, and confessors unfailingly hear from the majority of their penitents a mixture of sins and excusable actions or omissions. Probably it is the reason why it is not unusual for barrio people to say that they have no sin, when what they mean is that they have nothing to be ashamed about.

Christian faith must heal these cultural shortcomings, but in the process it must not be blind to the ways this state of affairs can contribute to Christian moral life. While it is imperative for the beginning of salvation that a man must confess his sinfulness (see Romans 3:9; 11:32; etc.), it is also salutary for him to realize that sin is not an insurmountable barrier between him and God if he has faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16; etc.). Filipino Theology could very well follow the lines of Pauline Theology in this matter. Or it could develop a Theology of Joy²⁵ ... the joy of the prodigal son and his father reunited in festive celebration.²⁶

²⁴ Leonardo Mercado, op. cit., pp. 77-92, and the authors he cites and/or recommends.

²⁵ See Pope Paul VI, "Gaudete in Domino" (Apostolic Exhortation on Christian Joy), *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 49, No. 550 (August 1975), pp. 505-529.

²⁶ A Theology of Filipino Values can also be explored, using works like: Vitaliano Gorospe; *Christian Renewal of Filipino Values* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1960); F. Jocano, *Growing Up in a Philippine Barrio* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969); Lynch-Frank-Guzman (eds.), *Four Readings on Philippine Values* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1970); H. de la Costa, "The Filipino National Tradition" in R. Bonoan (ed.), *Challenge for the Filipino* (Quezon City: Ateneo Publications Office, 1971), pp. 42-56.

EUCCHARIST

Christ instituted the Eucharist as a *memorial* of his Passion and Death: "do this as a memorial of me" (Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 11:24.25); "Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death" (I Corinthians 11:26). Furthermore, he wanted his disciples to recognize his presence as the Risen Lord in the "breaking of the Bread" (Luke 24:30.35).

The Last Supper meal was not an ordinary meal. It was a sacred meal — an anticipated celebration of the Jewish Passover, which Jesus will transform into the Christian Passover. It was a meal that *made present* in some mysterious way, the saving power which God exercised when he liberated the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt.

Equivalent of these historical dimensions of the Eucharist cannot be found in Filipino culture. No matter how "sacred" a meal may have been to the early Filipinos, its sacredness was not attached to any salvific event. As far as this is concerned, it is imperative for Filipino theology to borrow from sacred history.

Nevertheless, the meaning of a meal in Filipino culture has something to contribute to the enrichment of the sacrament of the Eucharist. This would not be in the "memorial" aspect of the sacrament, but in its tie-up with the Risen Christ who is made present. The Filipino meal is a celebration of friendship with those who are present. It is a rejoicing on account of food and company.

Certain Filipino meals attempt to establish communion with the world of the departed, or the world of spirits. This special characteristic can be taken up in a Filipino celebration of the Eucharist and transformed into a communion with Risen Christ.

The Eucharist in Filipino Theology would be more strongly resurrectional than in western Theology. It should be more joyful too.

As for the manner of partaking in the Eucharist (communion), it should be noted that in Filipino culture the act of feeding somebody (*subo*) symbolizes affection. This is best illustrated in the custom which dictates that newlyweds should feed

each other with a piece of the wedding cake. Hence the Filipino way of partaking in the Eucharist (communion) should preferably be by *subo* (the priest putting the host into the mouth of the recipient). This enriches Communion with a gesture of affection between minister and communicant.

These examples of healing Filipino culture with Christian faith and enriching Christian faith with Filipino culture are few and tentative, but they open up vistas of what can be done. I am indebted to Fr. Mercado's work, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, inasmuch as it has opened my eyes to the theological possibilities of Filipino culture. However, his work has not sufficiently indicated the "healing" needed by Filipino culture. And although he has theologized by pointing out similarities between Filipino and biblical culture, he has not shown how Filipino culture can add to Christian faith what is missing in western theologies, and perhaps even in biblical theology.

III

CONCLUSION

People today clamor for Theology to reflect on the contemporary Philippine situation and come up with Christian answers suited to the Filipino mentality (See Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* 62). This, certainly, is a task that Theology must do. But it cannot be properly done unless we first reflect on our identity as a people, see ourselves in the light of Christian faith, and revitalize this faith with traits that are our very own. We have to admit that this task has hardly started. We still have a long way to go before we can truly say that we have produced a Filipino Theology. Hopefully the meeting of minds and hearts and the sharing of life-experiences that this colloquium has made possible will prove to be a giant step towards Filipino Theology.

EFREN RIVERA, O.P.
University of Santo Tomas
Manila