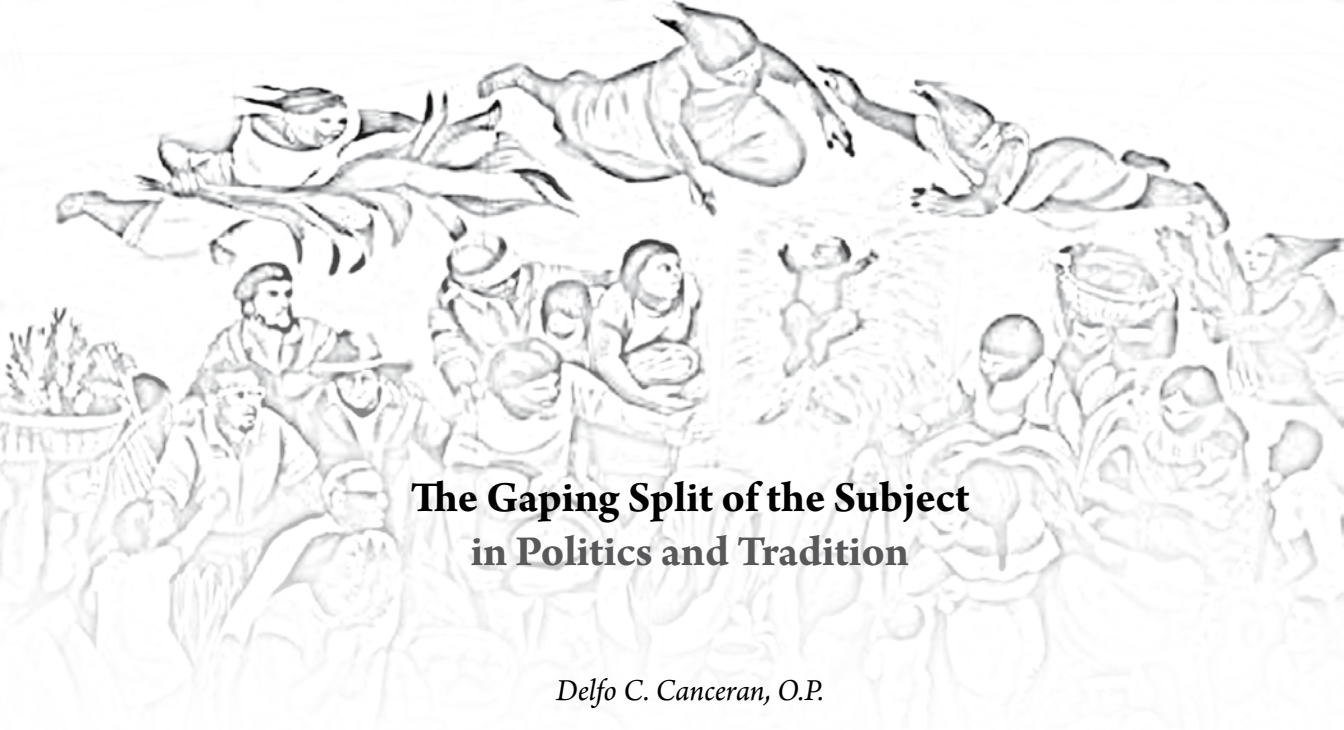




The Gaping Split of the Subject in Politics and Tradition

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This article delves into the uneasy relationship between tradition and politics. This relationship is explained by the prevailing binary logic that operates in the framework of the institutional church. To address this relationship, liberation theology attempts to bridge the gap that separates them in its engagement with the world. However, this solution is inadequate because it glosses over the subject of engagement. Thus, this article attempts to offset that inadequacy by returning the analysis to the subject. Through psychoanalysis, Lacan posits the subject as deeply split and marked by insatiable desire. This understanding of the subject is applied to the theologian in trying to represent the poor in her/his theologizing. The theologian should accept her/his vulnerability and inability to represent the real in its attempt to interpret the other. In this case, the theologian avoids the pitfalls of comprehending the real by enclosing it.

Keywords: *Tradition, politics, liberation theology, psychoanalysis, real, desire, subject, culture*

Introduction

The relationship between politics and tradition in the practice of the institutional church has been a continuing sociological and theological question especially in reference to the church's active engagement in the world. This question becomes evident with the emergence of liberation theology, which attempts to bridge the gap between faith and politics through the employment of social analysis of massive poverty or rampant underdevelopment prevailing in the Third World countries. Inspired by this theology, the church – laypeople and clergy alike – are convinced in the imperative of the mission of the church in society and, from this conviction, they have joined in the struggle of the

poor who are dehumanized by debilitating poverty. To justify their struggle, they derive their inspiration from the historical Jesus who proclaimed the reign of God as the core message of Christianity. They have foregrounded the prophetic mission of the church in proclaiming justice in the world and in criticizing social injustice in society. In effect, liberation theology has filled the deficiency of traditional theology that grips the institutional church from its political participation in society. Since they involve themselves in the struggle, liberation theologians have become critical of the institutional church and ecclesiastical hierarchy. Of course, there are papal encyclicals tackling social questions, nonetheless the participation of the institutional church remains limited to armchair undertaking or academic intellectualizing. The institutional church dodges or resists actual participation in the struggle of the poor because, by doing so, it could inevitably divide the church into social classes which can undermine its communion or effectively expose the elitism of the institutional church that surreptitiously supports the *status quo*. Thus, liberation theology is able to conscientize the institutional church in its conservative approach and elitist attitude and to tackle head on social problems, such as poverty, by using its prophetic role in denouncing injustice in the world. Nonetheless, liberation theology did not radically break from the entire tradition of the church but merely revives its prophetic vocation.

In this paper, I would like to delve into the reasons for the conspicuous divorce of faith from politics. I will revisit and reformulate the problematic relationship between faith and politics highlighting the binary logic that operates in their interaction. I will point out the diagnosis that the prevailing binary logic, which dominates our mental framework is singled out as a significant reason for the reluctance and even the letdown of the institutional church in its engagement with politics. Basically, I shall engage in a critique that questions the taken for granted truth of this binary logic so that the possibility of liberation could be reflected upon and pushed through. In this sense, critique can fundamentally interrogate our institutional practices. Michel Foucault provides us with an apt description of “critique:”

I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself [/herself] the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth... Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.¹

Thus, critique questions the hitherto sacrosanct notions of power and truth so that we can liberate the actors from ideological containment. In particular, we

¹ Michel Foucault, “What is Critique,” in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Robinow & Nikolas Rose (New York & London: The New Press, 2003), 266.

need to subject the prevailing binary logic of the public and private spheres or realms into persistent critique because it imprisons or traps our mentality into a myopic or parochial viewpoint. However, we should not merely focus on this binary logic because it could be inadequate in understanding this longstanding divorce. We should not bypass the actors but rather include them into our discourse. Thus, I will zero in on the subject who is the actor or agent in the practice of tradition and politics. In foregrounding the subject, I will employ Lacanian psychoanalysis focusing on the split that characterizes it. Thus, I have divided my presentation into two general parts: The first part deals with the binary logic that operates in our mental framework, which informs our practices, and the second part delves into the psychoanalysis of the subject that is characterized by a split whereby the subject is perpetually divided and alienated from itself. In employing Lacanian psychoanalysis, I would like to deconstruct the modern subject that claims autonomy and unity and to show the underlying desire and lack in the subject.

Prevailing Binary Logic

The topic on politics and tradition allows us once again to foreground the question of their uneasy relationship. This relationship is framed in a perspective that separates faith and politics. This framework constitutes or inhabits the author (theologian), which informs his/her mindset and conditions his/her practice in the world.² As it has been correctly observed, politics and tradition are couched or framed in a binary logic that restricts the scope and application of faith in social engagement. This binarism is traceable from Greek thought that structures western thought. This structure opposes politics (*polis*) and the household (*oikos*) which can be extended into the separation between the public sphere and the private sphere, where the former is the domain of politics while the latter is the domain of faith. Furthermore, this binarism also structures tradition that separates and opposes the sacred (as the world of the transcendent and divine) and profane (as the world of immanence and human). This binary logic is reinforced by the adherence to the dualistic worldview of the city of God and city of Man. In this sense, faith since it is otherworldly is attributed to the city of God, while politics since it is worldly is ascribed to the city of Man. As a consequence, faith and politics are unfortunately divorced.

This binary logic does not only separate the two domains but also hierarchizes them where each realm must be sustained and not be transgressed. This division is even inscribed in our very own Philippine Constitution, wherein the inviolable separation between the church and state is highlighted. The political sphere (state) is the terrain of lay people in the world while the religious sphere (church) is the

² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); See also Simon de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

territory of the ordained ministers in the church. Thus, the clergy is prohibited to openly engage in politics, if not strictly refrained. However, the clergy is both a citizen of the state and a minister of the church. Thus, the clergy can participate in political as well as religious domains by virtue of that membership. In this situation, the clergy is caught into a dilemma or tension created by this superficial division. The consequence of this separation is far-reaching because it erects an invisible wall between these realms, thereby limiting options for the clergy. Our mindset or perspective defines and dictates the extent of our behavior and practice and the transgression of this sacrosanct boundary is an anathema or an interdict.

Disambiguating Tradition and Politics

Tradition and politics have been couched into different and also contradictory discourses depending upon the ideological interests and beliefs of the proponents. Sometimes, we take them for granted thinking that they are self-explanatory and self-evident. However, if you subject them into critical scrutiny, they become problematic not only theoretically but also in practice. I would therefore need to explicate my understanding of politics and tradition. Thus, in this section, I would like to clarify these concepts and offer my interpretation.

A. On Tradition

Let me begin with tradition. Perusing the classical work of Yves Congar, “tradition” is conceived both as an object transmitted and an act of transmission which implicates the giver and the receiver of the object transmitted. Congar remarks: “Elementary analysis of the concept of tradition, as a matter of transmission or delivery, shows moreover that two persons are implied, one to transmit and one to receive.”³ However, this transmission of tradition is not a mere passive reception of the object but an active presentation because of the impression of the object impinged on the consciousness of the recipient through reflection on it. As Congar argues: “Thus, tradition will not be merely a transmission followed by a passive, mechanical reception; it entails the making present in a human consciousness of a saving truth.”⁴ This explanation of tradition elides or hides the question of the actor in such a transmission and presentation: Who transmits and presents the object? In both instances, it is the giver of the object who transmits and presents it to the consciousness of the recipient. In this sense, the giver dominates the relationship of transmission and presentation of the object. The receiver merely reflects on the object given to his/her consciousness that mirrors it.

³ Yves M.-J. Congar, OP, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 240.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

Basically, in this conceptualization, tradition is a transmission where two subjects (the giver and the receiver) are implicated and their relationship is mediated by the object given and received. The object is instilled in the consciousness of the recipient initiated by the giver. The object received by the consciousness is abstracted and entered into the consciousness. The object transmitted is deemed 'pure' since the transmission is likened to a channel that acts as a vehicle or conduit of that flow or exchange. In this sense, the emphasis is laid on the object given and received. In a sense, there is a one-to-one correspondence established between the giver and the receiver where the object is communicated or transmitted. Thus, the object is deposited in the consciousness pure and simple. Although the receiver, not just the giver, is also viewed as a dynamic participant in the transmission, s/he is nonetheless deprived of an equal balance having no significant impact in the transformation of the object. In the end, the receiver is merely expected to observe fidelity in the reception and transmission of the object.

However, for John Thiel, tradition should be viewed and understood from the hermeneutical sense as an interpretative enterprise of the receiver who is the interpreter of the text.⁵ In this hermeneutic act, it is not only the biblical text that is interpreted but also ecclesiastical tradition. Thus, there should be no double standard whereby scriptures are subjected to interpretative criticism while tradition is spared from critical scrutiny. Just like scriptures, tradition is subjected to hermeneutics since it is also a text handed or pass on to different generations by their ancestors. If there are the so-called senses of scriptures, there should also be equally senses of tradition. If tradition is subjected to the force of interpretation, then we can release it from a narrow or myopic understanding. In this gesture, tradition unleashes its polyvalence as it is continually interpreted. Thus, tradition cannot be taken in a monolithic sense but it should be understood in polysemic understanding. When tradition is released from the grip of authority, it can set free more liberating and continuing interpretations. Thus tradition can generate multiple meanings beyond expectation. This multiplicity of meanings should not wary or discourage us since we allow the text to generate meanings. In short, we open it up.

Jacques Derrida deconstructs the understanding of tradition as transmission by providing an alternative. In its place, the model of translation has supplanted transmission whereby language is transformed in the process. In this case, the translation of one language to another is never considered identical but it has undergone a transformation that creates a surplus or shortfall of significance.⁶ Moreover, he employs dissemination in understanding this transformation. Dissemination displaces both the giver and the object of tradition by focusing on

⁵ John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 20.

the text (object) which is undergoing some transformation and contamination of signification. The giver is dethroned from its privileged position because s/he is no longer in control of the production of meaning of the text; rather it is the encounter or interplay between the text and the reader that is installed in the creation of signification.⁷ As explained by Mark C. Taylor, dissemination is the act of dispersing, diffusing, broadcasting or promulgating of the word in different contexts. The text falls into different contexts that produce novel meanings. The text once grafted on other contexts becomes 'out of context' because the seed is already relocated in other soils, so to speak. The text is neither solely determined by the author (the giver) nor fastened to a single place (context), but it is transported and shifted to different recipients and situations. Thus, the author disappears and its disappearance is a *conditio sine qua non* of meaning-making. To put it in another way, the giver is dead and that death animates the text. The text lives on. However, its life is vitiated or contaminated by spreading and reading without the determination of the author and reference to a context. Such is the nature of the dissemination of language: the word will never return and is never identical.⁸

Furthermore, the words have been used not once but several times. The repetition of their usage has generated or produced meanings beyond our expectation where we can no longer sanitize or insulate these words from ongoing supplementaries or intertwinements. The present use is being haunted by the past and being awaited by the future. Thus, the present is not actually a simple now but a complex concatenation of meanings. There is always a trace of the other attached to these signs or words. The iterability or repetition of sign produces significations. Thus, when a sign is used, it cannot present itself in its totality making the sign haunted by the other meanings used in the past and will be created still in the future. The trace always already contaminates the handling or passing of tradition beginning from the past and up to the present and even to the future. In dissemination, language is scattered or spread where the source and the destination are indeterminate or indistinct. We can no longer distinguish the original from the repetition because they interweave seamlessly. Dissemination overcomes or better disrupts the binary logic because the delineation of the giver and the receiver, and the object and the subject, have been collapsed or blurred. Tradition is already cut off from the author and is impured by dissemination.⁹

⁷ Geoffrey Bennington & Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 56.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Boarderlines," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, eds. Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman & Hillis Miller (London & Kegan Paul, 1979), 102-103.. See also, Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 119-120.

⁹ Although the conservatives do not accept such understanding of tradition, we can still argue that it is in fact done in practice, albeit unavowedly. Let me give an example: both scholastic theology and the PCP II are parts and parcels of our ecclesiastical or institutional tradition. Although they are apart for many centuries, the scholastic theology is far stronger on its grip on the consciousness

According to Kathryn Turner, the reception of tradition involves the selectivity of the readers or actors in interpreting the content of tradition.¹⁰ In this sense, interpretation of tradition is selective; it involves a process of inclusion and exclusion. In short, the identity of tradition is a product of choice. The interpreter only chooses the things in tradition which favors or suits his/her preference or viewpoint. It could not take the whole gamut of tradition; it only picks up a part of it. This part that it includes is enclosed in a framework that the interpreter deploys in interpreting tradition. This process of selectivity applies to all interpreters of texts. In order to check and change it, we need to apply deconstructive critique that interrogates our preferred interpretation. In this case, tradition is an ongoing process of interrogation of the interpretation by focusing not only of the inclusion but, more importantly, of the exclusion made so that we can deconstruct its official or dominant interpretation. As we deconstruct tradition, interpretation becomes more and more democratized since people can participate in on-going interpretive enterprise. In this way, tradition is now divided and multiplied in the process. We can no longer contain tradition because it has already been grafted into different texts. In fact, the recourse to the origin is just the prerogative of the authority that appropriates or assumes the right to represent it. Turner insists that because of this selectivity, interpreters or readers of tradition should offer compelling arguments to back up his/her position in upholding a particular viewpoint or perspective. It should be noted, however, that the legitimization of historical interpretation is not based on an “anything goes” process, but rather goes through a process of normative acceptability.

Dale Erving interrogates the alleged monolithic tradition, wherein he eventually unleashes it into multiple meanings of the past and also multiple options in the future.¹¹ The present is a point whereby the interpreter reclaims the past and anticipates the future in the act of interpretation and reinterpretation. He discovers that historically tradition is not one but many. The many is a potent force for interpretation. As we know in Western philosophy, the one is given a prominent place in our discourse that forecloses or precludes the many or, if the many is ever recognized, it is nonetheless fused into one or unity. Thus, he suggests that we need to stir up or open up tradition from this rigidity or stricture so that we can release and free the fecundity of tradition. Tradition is then unfettered in fluidity and multiplicity that allows dissent and resistance in arguments. The text of tradition is woven in different strands and networks of human experiences, which are themselves already

of the hierarchy and the institution than the theology of the PCP-II. Moreover, although they are non-contradictory or exclusive, the PCP-II is more attune to the signs of the times compared to the backwardness of the medieval scholasticism. Nonetheless, scholastic theology recruits more adherents in the hierarchy or contains the norms of the institution, if not in theory, in practice.

¹⁰ Kathryn Tanner, “Postmodern Challenges to ‘Tradition,’” *Louvain Studies*, 28 (2003), 175-193.

¹¹ Dale Erving, *Christian Histories, Christian Traditioning: Rendering Accounts* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998).

strands of smaller and multiple histories. In this sense, there are multiple senses of tradition, which is subject to the interpretative enterprise.

B. On Politics

Let me now shift to politics. Politics, as it is understood in contemporary discourse, is a site of struggle because it involves power relations as Foucault conceives it.¹² Politics implicates the exercise or exertion of power that revolves around domination and resistance. Thus, power is not merely a unitary action of domination; but also a counteraction of resistance so that power is really a relation of subjects engaged in struggle. Power and resistance are inseparably tied in this relation. Foucault provides two meanings of the subject: the first is the common meaning of subject as subjection, and second is the peculiar meaning as subjectification. In subjection, the subject is subjected to someone else. In this sense, one is subservient to the other. We can refer the Marxist notion of exploitation and oppression as a clear manifestation of domination of one over the other wherein the capitalists exploit and oppress the workers. In subjectification, the subject recognizes itself in the ideology or in the interpellation. In this instance, the subject is constituted by an ideology which it has already internalized it. The subject then recognizes itself in that ideology. In this sense, the subject assumes an abstract concept because the domination is hidden but consented. In this Foucaultian concept of power relations, politics is no longer conceived as the division between the powerful and the powerless but a network of relations that constitutes the subject. Applying power relations, the 'empowerment' of the poor is therefore a misnomer because the poor are not deprived of but equipped with power which they exercise in their ordinary and everyday life. Nonetheless, power is asymmetrically exercised by subjects.¹³

Furthermore, politics is a social concept because it includes social groups imbued with political interests.¹⁴ I would like to underscore the groups intertwined with and motivated by their peculiar interests. There are no groups devoid of interests. These interests may either be implicit/unconscious or explicit/conscious to their

¹² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Collin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); Michel Foucault, "Afterward: Subject and Power," in *Michael Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Robinow (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).

¹³ James Scott in his field works made an ethnographic study of the everyday resistance of the ordinary people. Inspired by Foucault, Scott avers that power is manifested in various forms. Thus, we have to examine our work of empowerment. We do not really empower the poor as though power emanates from a source and is endowed to the recipient. The poor only need to realize their potent power by organizing and mobilizing themselves so that they can make a difference. James C. Scott, *Resistance of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Geoffrey Ponton & Peter Gill, *Introduction to Politics*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982). W. Phillips Shively, *Power & Choice: An Introduction to Political Science* (Boston: McGraw Hill 2007).

groups. The trajectory is that the interests will surface or reveal in consciousness so that these groups become self-conscious of themselves where they become aware of their interests and struggle for their advancement. In effect, society is fractured by social groups and political interests. There is no such thing as a homogenous or monolithic society. Society is marked by differences such as ethnicity, class, religion and sex, to name just a few. These groups ordinarily work for the advantage or advancement of their interests. They are categorized based on some qualities and are recognized as such on the basis of these characteristics. We identify ourselves with some groups where we feel comfortable with and where we want to belong. These interests can either be selfish, altruistic or diverse in motives. Even in a representative government where their officials or leaders are supposed to represent the interests of their respective constituents, they may only represent their own interests or some select groups because they have some stakes on them. We cannot do away with representation, but we need to question it and to allow others to represent themselves because they have the right to self-representation. Because of these different groups with their peculiar interests, we expect some competitions and conflicts in various social interactions, not only in terms of inter-group relationship but also intra-group relationship. Thus, competition or conflict is not merely between the rich and the poor but also among the poor or among the rich themselves. The important thing in our political discourse of competition and conflict is that we recognize their differences and their interests, which can cause tension and opposition in a given society so that we can manage or handle them.

Chantal Mouffe offers an alternative theory in conceiving politics in terms not of consensus as Habermasian communicative rationality has it, or reformulated in Christian thought as harmony in diversity, but as a space for conflict wherein people are provided with a venue to air their grievances and clamor for changes in society.¹⁵ Instead of abrogating or effacing differences, Mouffe favors the creation of a vibrant agonistic public sphere of contestation where different social groups with some political interests can be exposed and confronted. Instead of dodging the issue of conflict, politics should even encourage it by providing a venue for its expression and resolution. Oftentimes, we do not want to confront conflict because we consider it divisive and unruly. However, in evading it, we merely repress or suppress conflict because it remains underneath our relationship. Instead of hiding it, we should allow it to be articulated in the public sphere. This articulation of conflict in the public sphere demands respect and dialogue in an atmosphere of freedom and debate. We have to understand that as humans we are not merely guided by reason but also influenced by emotion. In fact, emotion can motivate us to take action on some issues because we are affected by events that trigger us to act or move. By confronting conflict head-on, we ease the lurking tensions and relieve people from these pent-up emotions.

¹⁵ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005).

Psychoanalyzing the Subject

I would want to assert that although the binary logic has been slowly recognized and even interrogated, we still need to broaden our horizon and shift our attention to the subject as the actor or agent of tradition and politics. In short, we cannot just leave or ignore the subject in our understating of tradition and politics. The subject embodies the binary structure operating in tradition and politics and is affected by them in various forms. In this part, we shall underscore the subject characterized by psychic split. However, this split is not only characterized by binarism of faith and politics but by a split within the self and its relationship with the other. In its formation, the subject is characterized by misrecognition and alienation from himself/herself.¹⁶ This split will never achieve synthesis or fusion. Moreover, this split is due to the presence and intervention of the unconscious which bars consciousness from self-transparency. The subject remains opaque to himself/herself. Thus, the subject is not merely alienated from but in a certain way, unknown to himself/herself.

Thus, I would like to delve more into the subject of political struggle because I believe that this topic is often glossed over in political discourse.¹⁷ The subject of political discourse is exempted or exonerated from scrutiny and criticism endowing him/her a privileged position by ascribing him/her a transcendental status and originary consciousness. Having this privilege, the subject becomes an overseer of the world and a ventriloquist of the rest. The subject assumes a universal position. Psychoanalysis attempts to deconstruct this autonomous subject by positing a subject marked by the unconscious. Both politics and tradition are not detached or separated from the subject but they are related to and embodied by a particular subject. The subject is constituted by politics (power relations) and tradition (belief systems) that enable and constraint it in its engagement in the world. Liberation theology propounds the practice of solidarity with the poor and church people should take the option for the poor. Nonetheless, the poor are the main actors of struggle for their liberation. These theologians should join the poor and justify their struggle in reference to the prophetic mission of the church inscribed in the Reign of God. I think this idea of solidarity remains to be inadequate in understanding the relationship between church and politics. We need to supplement it by employing Lacanian psychoanalysis in understanding the subject. I would like only to underscore two Lacanian ideas, namely, the mirror stage and the desiring subject.¹⁸

¹⁶ For further discussion on recognition, see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

¹⁷ For further discussion on the participation of the subject in political engagement, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London: Routledge, 1977). See also Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Alan Sheridan (New York: & London: Norton, 1981).

The imaginary domain is mainly characterized by the mirror stage, which is marked by a dual relation between the ego and the specular image. The relationship is likened to a mirror-image whereby the subject is divided between identification with and alienation from the other, and recognition and misrecognition of the self in the mirror. Thus, the mirror-image is, in fact, a sham. There are two reasons given for this assertion, first, physically and second, psychically. The other (mother) in the mirror is physically whole but the self (infant) is physically fragmented. This fragmentation is manifested in the helplessness of the infant in providing her/his own needs. The subject depends on the other who caters and satisfies the need. The other is seen as omnipotent not only because she fills the need, but also determines it. The subject is contrasted to the other since the former is incapacitated while the latter is powerful. The other is seen by the subject as phallic. When we speak of phallus, we mean omnipotence. Moreover, the subject is united with the other since no barrier separates them. This unity is shown in the intimate embrace of the mother to her infant. The mother breastfeeds the infant with her milk. In this relationship, the mother directly satisfies the infant's needs. There is never a mediation in that relationship. Soon the subject realizes that the other is different and separate from him/her. This is exhibited in the relationship of the mother with the father. The father intervenes in their unity. That realization brings a trauma for the subject because now it realizes that the other is different or separate from the subject. From that separation, the subject yearns for the bliss directly provided by the other. Thus, the subject longs to be reunited with the other by summoning it back to itself. Nonetheless, that desire for unification or wholeness is never realized. The subject remains forever lacking or wanting. Generally, there is a tension built up in the subject due to its uneasy relationship with the other characterized by alienation and misrecognition in the mirror stage.

Our interaction with the other in our political engagement is likened to the mirror stage whereby the mirror-image metaphor is applied in that relationship. We as subjects are caught up into a specular relationship with the other. Such relationship is marked by misrecognition and alienation because the subjects assume that they are identified and united or, to use a favorite expression in liberation theology, in solidarity with the poor, but, in reality, they remain different and separate from the other. This is manifested in the fragmentation of our social positions that we simultaneously or contradictorily occupy in various situations and groups. We are not merely citizens in the country, but also ministers of the church, administrator of an institution, professors in theology, colleagues of a faculty, officer of an association and brothers to our siblings. We want to be in solidarity with the other, but we belong to different identifications and affiliations. That mobility positions us differently. Thus, we experience distance and ambiguity within our self-identity. We are fragmented because of our different positions, groups and needs. We are

split between identification and disidentification, between identity and difference, between commiseration and repulsion with the other. We have to come to terms with these tensions and clashes or else we become aggressive and violent with the other. This aggression or violence is manifested or articulated not just verbally or physically but also psychically and internally in a subtle and surreptitious way.

Moreover, psychoanalytic theory offers the theory of desire that underlies the subject. The subject is characterized by desire. Desire is an unconscious reality that cannot be known directly but only represented obliquely through symptoms that occasionally reveal it. Thus, we only know its symptoms which we need to decipher or unravel into analytic discourse. Desire is defined by lack. Desire is not merely a psychic or subjective reality but it is a deeply social reality because it implicates the subject and the other - it is a desire of/for the other (*le désir de l'autre*). The relationship implies that the subject desires the other or better the subject desires the desire of the other. Desire is a wish that we want to fulfill that need which, in an outward fashion, is linguistified or symbolized through demands expressed in speech. Thus, the need (I need love) that is felt by the subject is translated or expressed in demand in language (I demand love). The need that is transformed in demand does not wholly coincide. They are not identical because the need has been reduced to demand. Such discrepancy is known as desire, which is the remainder or gap created by the difference between need and demand. This chasm shows that desire remains insatiable.

We are characterized by this lack as a permanent structure of our subjectivity – that of a lack in being. We want to be complete and powerful. However, Lacan posits a different subject against the modern subject. Contrary to the modern subject, we can never be autonomous subjects because we are carved out by lack having a hole in our being. We merely assume or pretend to be autonomous but, in reality, that is only a defense or a camouflage. By taking the desire of the other, the subject offers itself to the other so that its need is fulfilled and satisfied. We offer ourselves for the poor but we remain divided because deep inside us we are lacking or wanting. We only cover up our lack by pretending to be autonomous subjects capable of being sovereign. We merely cover up our insecurities and our inadequacies so that we appear to be whole and undivided. We assume to possess the phallus as a symbol of power of self-mastery but we merely disguise our lack of it so that we can project our abundance and might to other. But the subject does not possess the object of desire. It lacks it. We have our own lack that we need to fill and to satisfy. We become helpless because we can never bridge the gap that marks our subjectivity. Thus, the subject experiences frustration to be whole and deprivation due to lack.¹⁹

¹⁹ Joel Dor, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan: The Unconscious Structured Like a Language* (New York: The Other Press, LLC, 1998), 100–110.

Moreover, the symbolic order refers to the paternal language. In the symbolic order, the paternal language intervenes in the dyadic relation established between the subject and the other. The intervention occurs in a linguistic manner. Language is the ruler in the symbolic order that restructures the relationship. In this newly formed relationship, the triadic relationship supersedes the dyadic relationship. The subject is elevated as a speaking being by breaking from the other and clinging on to language. The symbolic order endows the subject with language. As the subject embraces language, it ascends to the symbolic order. Language is a system of signification by classification and categorization. The subject learns and internalizes language that represents its desire. Since language is a mere representation, it ruptures the relationship between the subject and the other. The world is no longer experienced directly, but mediated by language. Desire is already translated or articulated in language. Language differentiates or divides relationships through categories or labels imposed on need. Since the need is linguistified or codified in demand, it is merely represented but not presented. In effect, the need is reduced into language. Language alienates the subject from its need because the need is already constituted by and interpreted in language. The need is already converted into language.

The need turned or uttered in demands remains hanging or suspended because it is rendered and reduced into speech to represent it. As a representation, it acts as a symbolization or substitution of need. There is always a gap left by the difference between need and demand. This gap indicates a surplus or a remainder of need that cannot be filled and gratified by demand. The need is nominated or invoked in demand. The real object of desire is converted into a represented object in language. The need is no longer directly satisfied but mediated by words. However, that need substituted by language estranges and fragments the need because it is already subjected to interpretation. The subject can never achieve direct correspondence between need and language which never matches need. When reality is transformed into language, it is depleted into and replaced with language. Language is not a one-to-one correspondence but it is open to the possibility of a surplus or excess of multiple significations. Language is essentially polysemic. Left unsatisfied, desire craves for the other. There remains a memory trace of the real object of need craving for satisfaction that the represented object cannot gratify. In reality, desire is a psychic reality that no material object can ever satiate. To put it in another way, desire has no object in reality. The object is lost thereby becoming a missing thing which is beyond representation.²⁰

There is a tendency for theologians to interpret the plight of the poor, and therefore to represent the poor. We, however, learn from Lacan that nobody, including the clergy, has the privileged access to the reality of poverty, except perhaps

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1999).

the poor themselves who experience it directly. Moreover, in theologizing on the poor, theologians interpret their reality using their preferred perspective and favored framework. The danger is that they may be arrogating to themselves the right to represent the poor and comprehend poverty. In such a case, they may only be telling their perspectives and projecting their fantasies on the poor. This is shown in the way theologians have romanticized the poor or in the way they define poverty. The hazard is that they let off themselves from social critique and gloss over self-criticism. They become impervious and infallible. Theologians may, in various occasions and circumstances, also exploit and oppress the poor in subtle and covert ways. They may also be privy or party to the marginalization and discrimination of the poor in different ways. As I said, we occupy various social positions and we may in some locations become oppressors or exploiters of others, especially the poor.

Letting the Real

The Lacanian subject is split because the unconscious intervenes and ruptures it. The subject can never be unified or integrated into a whole or unity. The unconscious provides the transformation of interpretation of reality because it intervenes or interferes the symbolic order. Thus, the symbolic order can be altered or deranged by the unconscious in the production of meaning. The unconscious is not fixed nor fastened to a single meaning. It floats, so to speak, so that it slides and shifts meaning. The unconscious is primarily linguistic. Like language, the unconscious is trans-individual or socially constituted. Language is a social unconscious because it is shared communally and learned instinctively. The unconscious is a resident alien, so to speak, because it resides in the mind but not detained by it. It belongs to the individual but is not exclusive to it. The unconscious is composed of a battery of signifiers that cannot be attached or fixed into a single signified. Since they are mobile, the signifiers are excessive and overflowing with surplus signification. The signifier and the signified are always detached and broken so that the signifier is free to move in different locations and to mean different significations. Thus, there is a need to subject these signifiers revealed in symptoms in an analysis.²¹

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the real lies outside language and resists linguistification. The real is the impossible because it is inassimilable to imagination and unrepresentable in symbol. The real can neither be expressed in nor captured by language because it eludes or slips through language. The subject and the text want to detain it into an official or authoritative interpretation, but the real resists and escapes it. As Joerg Riger argues:

²¹ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969 and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Dordrecht and Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1978).

...the Lacanian real functions as a limit structure. It limits the excessive powers of the self and of the text and initiates their constructive transformation, putting to new use the basic building blocks of those two camps whose opposition is often seen to be all-determinative in contemporary theology, and reconstructing their various repressions.²²

Thus, the real shows the limit of language for it refuses capitulation. Realizing this limit, Joerg Rieger suggests that liberationist theologians should employ Lacanian psychoanalysis in guiding their theologizing. He insists that liberation theologians should begin not with identity but with difference or alterity of the poor. The poor are irreducibly and infinitely other. The theologians cannot capture or contain the poor. They cannot confine or arrest them with their preferred theological discourse or framework. They can slip away. In theological discourse, theologian aspires to be systematic and to be comprehensive in its presentation of the situation or condition of the poor. This is done when the theologians claim the authority to speak in behalf of the poor because they assume that they already know the poor. The mind of the theologians only records and mirrors the poor. There is no language that mediates the poor but their consciousness immediately reflects or reveals the poor. Thus the mind and reality coincide. Rieger warns theologians of this lurking temptation. He avers that theologians cannot claim a privileged viewpoint because the poor are the actors and sources of significations. The theologians cannot claim the unilateral right to represent them. They cannot represent the poor even if they claim to side and struggle with the poor. To claim otherwise is to deny the poor of equal representation and thereby repress the knowledge of the poor. The theologians are only one among the many members of the community that signify the situations of poverty. The poor remain an irreducible and unrepresentable other. The universal poor do not exist in reality because they are differently positioned and situated. Thus the relationship between theologian and the poor is marked by alterity. Although the theologian wants to be in solidarity with the poor, s\he remains different from them in many ways. S\he cannot be totally the same or identified with them.²³

²² Joerg Rieger, *Remember the Poor: The Challenge to Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998), 87.

²³ There is a hermeneutical circle operating in the relationship between the subject and the other. The theologian interprets the need of the other and desires the need of the other. The theologian responds to the others who wallow in debilitating poverty. The theologian heeds the other by offering him/herself to the other that would hopefully alleviate itself from this misery. The theologian identifies her/himself with the other whom s\he considers as a victim or survivor of the oppressive system of injustice because of our liberation theology compels the theologian to a solidarity with the poor together with their struggle. This identification goes against our self-interest and self-image where the subject assumes autonomy and self-mastery. The answer is not only that the subject is insufficient or incapable but also because the subject has certain needs and demands that s/he has to attend and satisfy. This fragmentation within the subject causes frustration in the subject and deprivation of the other.

Creating Political Culture

Instead of delving further into politics and tradition, I decided to shift on political sociology, which deals with the creation of a political culture in the psychology of people.²⁴ The socialization of subjects in actual political environment is a crucial aspect of political sociology. Such socialization dispossess the subjects to a particular political orientation by equipping with a particular 'habitus,' to use Bourdieu's terminology. This socialization is a means of both learning and unlearning process, which, in the end, enables the subjects to effectively participate and function in a political movement for social change. Social cognition is formed in the subjects from a series of socialization. Through this socialization, the subjects develop a certain mental framework and behavioral attitude needed in political movement. In the process, this socialization leads to sedimentation of our framework. This sedimentation process can become permanent if the subjects are not equally equipped with a critical mindset in questioning it. We need to question the equation or the identification of ideas and reality. Since our framework is something constructed by and to us in our socialization, then it can be transformed through an ongoing and persistent critique. In effect, the mind is opened up to possible alteration or transformation.

We are caught up in various socializing agents around us that structure our subjectivity. We are not only socialized in the home since we also go out from home and are exposed outside the home. Moreover, the home is no longer exclusively a private domain since it is already invaded by media of communication through modern technology. Thus, the distinction between primary socialization and secondary socialization has been blurred or even collapsed by technology. The boundary of socialization has been disrupted in an ever expanding and diversified universe of communication. The collapse of this distinction can be taken as a positive development of resocialization since the subjects are exposed to different sources of information that influence them. Since these sources impinge on our subjectivity and consciousness, they construct us by inhabiting ourselves. Since they come from different agencies, the sources are diverse and contradictory. They are not harmonious, but conflictive. This situation enables the subjects to be fragmented and loosened. In effect, they can choose among the existing sources available to them and interweave them producing a different type of discourse.

²⁴ See Glenn Tinder, *Political Thinking: The Perennial Questions*, 6th Edition (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004); Alan R. Ball & B. Guy Peters, *Modern Politics and Government*, 6th Edition (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000); Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Blackwell Publishing, 2000); Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Brain Barry, *Political Argument* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); Michael Rush, *Politics and Society: An Introduction to Political Sociology* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1992); Jan Campbell & Janet Harbord, eds. *Psycho-politics and Cultural Desires* (New York & London: UCL Press, 1998).

The critical aspect should provide a space for reflection and practice where the subjects can develop political awareness and critical engagement. This space should allow and encourage questioning reality. By questioning reality, the subjects gain more knowledge by transforming their reality. Since reality is changeable, they can create their own world and be responsible to it. However, this change is an on-going process. We cannot create a new world instantly, we need to struggle in transforming the world. Thus, subjects should continue to engage in social questions and join in social movements. This critique and engagement can be empowering and liberating because it alters mindsets and transforms reality.

Political socialization is a learning process of subjects from a particular environment. This learning environment should be focused in the context of the other. Of course, there are many sources of political socialization but we need to be immersed into the complex and dynamic situation of the other. The other poses the question to us so that we can check our framework if it is still usable and workable. In this continuing encounter with the other, we can overcome the cage that can imprison us. We can then reevaluate and recast our framework in view of the revelation of the other. But the other is not a pure and single other but it is always already marked by identificatory categories such as class, sex and ethnicity, to name just a few. In this case, we cannot lump the other into an overarching abstract category. The other must be taken into that multifaceted reality. Thus, as theologians, we should also consider our difference, not just in education, but also in class, in gender, in lifestyle and in outlook. In that case, the difference between the theologians and the poor are foregrounded. The political culture that we would like to foster should lead toward the creation of a space for otherness or alterity because the real cannot be captured or imprisoned in the limit imposed by our framework or perspective. The other is excessive with meanings. The other should not only be recognized within our preferred framework but also affirmed by openness. Thus, society should develop a culture of difference – a space for alterity – that does not repress or suppress it.

The purpose of creating a political culture in the subject is neither to triumph over the split nor to come up with a unity but rather to acknowledge our lack and to recognize our vulnerability. This move is a requirement for self-critique. We are split subjects and marked by lack, albeit unacknowledged or unavowed. We unconsciously assume that we are sufficient to fill the lack of the other by responding to their needs. We interpret their needs from our preferred or favored framework. We are driven by that interpretation by supposing that it is the right diagnosis and solution. Lack is related to desire and we desire what we lack. To put it differently, it is lack that causes desire to manifest in the subject. We desire the desire of the other – the desire to get out from misery. Moreover, the self-knowledge of our split and lack allows us to build up a community or society joined together through the acceptance of our lack and compassion for the poor. We are all wounded by the trauma of lack. Since nobody can

claim to be self-sufficient having autonomy and mastery, one can forge connections and establish affiliations that can sympathize or empathize with the other.

Ending Tentatively

Politics has outrun tradition which, because it is lagging behind, cannot cope with the on-going changes in society. Tradition is essentially conservative since the past is installed as the object of emulation by means of a repetition of the same. However, tradition has undergone shifts and transformations in the passage of time in history. Nonetheless, the institutional church clings to the conservative interpretation of tradition. If it remains stocked on the old framework, tradition becomes obsolete and irrelevant. Because tradition looks back, it can hardly move forward and lead in the frontier of political struggle. Thus, instead of relying on the contemporary political theories in facing the urgent problems in society and church, tradition relies on the past for guidance. We need to confront the past orientation of tradition. Although we cannot readily and immediately cut off ourselves from tradition, as we have it, we have to face the present and future head on. It is not yet too late. We can still effect change by developing a culture of politics that would socialize and resocialize subjects or agents in relevant politics. The agency of the subject lies on enacting politics or performing politics differently. We want to create a more democratic space for political engagement.

I am not against theologians engaging in the liberation of the poor in our society. In fact, this engagement is indeed laudable and heroic. However, theologians should engage into self-criticism so that they will not be trapped into a view from nowhere and everywhere that enables them to have a privileged position in knowledge. Theologians should be open to difference. They have to accept their vulnerability to comprehend reality and to recognize the finitude of their knowledge. They have to bear in mind that they can never frame the real because it escapes the confines of language and overflows with multiple significances. The real is always open to interpretation because we cannot exhaust its complexity. The unconscious that is repressed and suppressed will intervene and unleash the possibilities of creating new meanings. We need to interrogate our preferred framework that imprisons the real. Thus, theologians are humbled before the real because they cannot capture it. They can only make a provisional and tentative position and claim since there are various possibilities inherent in the real. Thus, a political culture of openness and contingency should be instilled and developed among theologians that can harness a culture of difference. The real can never be exchanged or transmitted by words. Thus, we need to continually reflect and recast our understanding of that real so that we will never reify or dogmatize our claim. ■

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