

Sawà at Awâ: A Filipino Perspective on Throw-away Culture and Pope Francis' Spirituality of Mercy

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Abstract: In terms of his critique of contemporary society, one of the key themes that recur in *Laudato Si'* and the other major documents of Pope Francis is “throw-away culture.” This he identifies as one of the root causes of the ongoing degradation, not only of the environment (LS 22), but also of human relationships and of society in general (EG 53, LS 123, AL 39). Another recurring theme in his writings is that of mercy or what he also calls a “culture of care” (LS 231, AL 191) or “culture of encounter” (EG 220), which can serve as an antidote to the double degradation brought by the “throw-away culture.” This paper explores these two important themes from Pope Francis and engages them from the lens of Philippine culture and experience through the words *sawà* and *awâ*.

Keywords: Pope Francis, culture of mercy, throwaway culture

Introduction

“We are living in a time of crisis,” Pope Francis alerts the world within the first few months of his Pontificate, “we see this in the environment, but above all we see this in mankind... And the peril is grave, because the cause of the problem is not superficial but deeply rooted.”¹ Later, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,

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¹ Francis, *General Audience on UN Environment Day*, 5 June 2013, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

he goes on: “We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new...”²

What is this new and growing “throw-away culture” the Pope is warning about? Is there an antidote to this emerging malaise? This paper aims at an exposition of this ‘throw away’ culture, its corresponding counter-culture, and their respective matrices, as tackled in the major texts of Francis. It will then move to an analysis of the same from the lens of Philippine culture and experience through the words *sawà* and *awâ*. Through this intercultural juxtaposition, our aim is to arrive at a deeper understanding of these two cultural realities, as well as of these two indigenous concepts.

Not just a phenomenon but a culture

In the same section of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis defined “throw-away culture” as exclusion, wherein certain sectors of society such as the poor and uneducated that have long been disadvantaged are no longer simply sidelined but totally ignored, no longer just exploited but altogether excluded. In his own words: “Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers.”³ In other words, “throw-away culture” treats certain categories of people as if they were “trash” that are but rightly discarded once they are no longer useful. As Ryan observes: “They are all, in their own ways, processes of dehumanization.”⁴

The usual victims of exclusion are those that belong to the categories of people commonly referred to as “minorities.” Cardinal Tagle accurately narrows down the idea of minority that the Church often refers to in her teachings as the “qualitative” minority, as opposed to the “quantitative” or “statistical” minority. He says that a small elite could actually wield cultural superiority in a particular context while the statistical majority could be living in a “minority” condition. In this more precise construction of minority, “the focus shifts from numbers to *actual* people who

² Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed 1 May 2018), 53.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fáinche Ryan, “The Times They Are A-Changin,” in *The Francis Factor: A New Departure*, ed. John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2014), 131.

experience being regarded as lesser in rank or importance within a societal hierarchy.”⁵ Another helpful term that Tagle employs in referring to this qualitative minority is “others,” where “other-ness is not a function of relatedness but of segregation.”⁶ Here, alterity is particularly understood not in terms of relative and factual distinction or difference but of distantiation, alienation, and isolation. The other is not me or mine, and therefore not my concern.

While not always conscious and overt, exclusion is often manifested in the form of apathy and lack of care about the plight of the “others,” as if they did not matter or did not exist. Pope Francis describes this as the “globalization of indifference” and the “loss of the sense of responsibility.”⁷ This kind of indifference, which he explicitly calls “sin” in his prayer at the end of *Laudato Si’*, can occur in all levels, from the interpersonal to the international, when minorities at risk are not given adequate consideration in the pursuit of personal or corporate gains, or even in the unmindful conduct of daily living. For instance, exclusion can be in the form of coldness or contempt towards the elderly who come to be regarded as burdensome or useless.⁸ It can also assume the form of wastefulness, especially when it comes to resources essential for human life like food and water, while so many people are in dire need of them.⁹ On the societal level, it can take the form of ignoring or dismissing the negative impact of development projects on vulnerable sectors like the poor and also on the natural environment.¹⁰ Excluded from people’s consideration, minorities become more and more excluded in fact, almost as if it were a naturally determined phenomenon: the elimination of the weakest in the survival of the fittest as dictated by the so-called “law of the jungle.”

While exclusion, certainly, is not an entirely new phenomenon, the world began to witness this on a massive scale beginning with the First Industrial Revolution that produced injustices and imbalances in all levels, local to international. As Leo XIII said in *Rerum Novarum*: “Hence, by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated, and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition.... the hiring of labor and the conduct of

⁵ Luis Antonio Tagle, “The Church’s Mission Toward Minorities” in *It is the Lord!: Occasional Lectures at Loyola School of Theology* (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 2003), 122.

⁶ Tagle, “The Church’s Mission Toward Minorities,” 124.

⁷ Francis, Encyclical Letter on the Care for Our Common Home *Laudato Si’*, 24 May 2015, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed 1 May 2018), 52, 25, 246. See also *Evangelii Gaudium*, 54, 203.

⁸ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 19 March 2016, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf (accessed 1 May 2018), 278.

⁹ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 50.

¹⁰ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 25.

trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich people have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.”¹¹ From small-time artisans who could not keep pace with large-scale factory production to developing countries who could not keep up with first world nations, those who at that time did not have the resources to keep abreast with the competition became progressively marginalized and were eventually left out in an unprecedented widening of the gap between the rich and poor.

With the advent now of the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0 marked by the pervasive integration of technology in various sectors and aspects of human life, new injustices and imbalances loom in the horizon with alarming repercussions, especially for minorities. The “computer illiterate” are becoming the new illiterate who are marginalized from education all the way to employment. Companies that are mechanized and digitalized gain an advantage over those that still use analog means of production that rely heavily on manual human labor, which is usually more expensive and less efficient. This leads to a growing pressure to shift towards mechanization and digitalization that then result in the rising displacement of many low-skilled laborers who find themselves in increasingly lower niches in value chains. As Cameron reports, “While experts disagree as to how many jobs will be taken over by machines, there is already a much wider range of applications of Machine Intelligence to tasks traditionally done by humans than many people realize. They include some highly skilled occupations which might have seemed immune to computerization, and the economics of this situation are potentially perilous for humans.”¹²

On the national and international scene, Internet penetration levels and other related variables like Internet speed, cost, and availability have also been shifting the playing field, putting at a disadvantage those in the worse off side of the so-called “digital divide.” Sy reports how “information technology has systematically excluded low-income, less educated people, the old, many ethnic minorities, and those far from cities and telecommunications infrastructures” around the world.¹³ As early as 2010, Benedict XVI already spoke of this incipient crisis, warning about how “This divide separates the included from the excluded and adds to the other discrepancies that

¹¹ Leo XIII, Encyclical on Capital and Labor *Rerum Novarum*, 15 May 1891, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (accessed 1 May 2018), 4.

¹² See Nigel Cameron, *Will Robots Take Your Job?: A Plea for Consensus* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2017) 14.

¹³ Peter Sy, “The Digital Divide and Rule: Grappling with the New Rhetoric of Development,” *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 17 (2002): 12.

are already distancing nations from one another and dividing them from within.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, Francis himself adds that “the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favor an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life.”¹⁵ As such, with the arrival of Industry 4.0, the world faces the real possibility of worsening exclusion.

Exclusion, however, as Pope Francis suggests, needs to be seen today not merely as an isolated phenomenon, but as a culture that permeates not only individuals but even society itself. “This ‘culture of waste’ tends to become a common mentality that infects everyone,” the Pope observes, “Human life, the person, are no longer seen as a primary value to be respected and safeguarded, especially if they are poor or disabled, if they are not yet useful — like the unborn child — or are no longer of any use — like the elderly person.”¹⁶ As such, to be able to understand its dynamics and operation, exclusion needs to be considered within the context of its larger cultural matrix.

“Throw-Away Culture:” Manifestations and Matrix

The matrix of this “throw-away culture” begins with *objectification*, a distorted way of looking at reality that the Pope links to the worldview of relativism. In such a worldview that refuses to accept the existence of objective values, the value of an object or person is basically reduced to its relative value based on utility or its “value to me,” while overlooking its intrinsic value or “value in itself or oneself.” Hence, the person or object is no longer recognized as an individual subject, with its own inherent value independent from its relative usefulness, but purely as an object to be used for pleasure and profit. At its inception, then, the problem of throw-away culture is fundamentally a matter of myopia: “The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.”¹⁷

In line with this, Shiffman notes that “For Pope Francis, the basic problem is the paradigm of the human subject as mastering an objectified nature.”¹⁸ According to

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants in a Congress on “Digital Witnesses: Faces and Languages in the Cross-Media Age,”* 24 April 2010, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/sp_eeches/2010/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100424_testimoni-digitali.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 209.

¹⁶ Francis, *General Audience of 5 June 2013*, 5 June 2013, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 6.

¹⁸ Mark Shiffman, “Between the Knower and the Known: *Laudato Si* and the Limits of the Scientific Spirit,” *Commonweal*, 25 March 2016, 17.

him, “this paradigm manifests an ethic of dominion and possession—an ethic shaped and reinforced by modern science’s methods of objectification.”¹⁹ This objectification naturally leads to consumption when the other is viewed no longer as an end but only as a means for one’s ends and purposes. From this distorted perception of the world arise the various abuses connected with the “throw-away culture” that are becoming rampant in our present society. As Francis avers:

The culture of relativism is the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labor on them or enslaving them to pay their debts. The same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly who no longer serve our interests. It is also the mindset of those who say: Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage. In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species? Is it not the same relativistic logic that justifies buying the organs of the poor for resale or use in experimentation, or eliminating children because they are not what their parents wanted?²⁰

This utilitarian and consumerist paradigm is accompanied and sustained in turn by its narrow logic of efficiency and immediacy, “the mindset of short-term gain and results,”²¹ which only aims at the quick and instant satisfaction of needs and wants, unmindful of its wide-reaching or long-term effects on others. Francis calls this the “culture of instant gratification” seen in the tendency towards “rampant individualism.” Within this paradigm, people become mindful only of their own welfare and interests, and the fastest and easiest means to attain these, even if it were to the detriment of vulnerable minorities who are outside their range of concern. As the Pope points out, this kind of mentality “has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all.”²² In effect, this orientation, which Pope Francis also calls the “culture of prosperity,” deadens our sense of solidarity and makes us indifferent to the sufferings of others:

Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 123.

²¹ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 181. In the Spanish text, it appears as “la lógica eficientista e inmediateista,” better highlighting this underlying obsession with efficiency and immediacy, whereas it is simply rendered in English as “the mindset of short-term gain and results.” See also paragraphs 162, 178, 189.

²² Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 82.

and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.²³

Moreover, the Pope also adverts to the reality of intergenerational injustice, remarking that this imperviousness to the ongoing plight of minorities also makes people insensitive to the ensuing predicament that future generations are bound to suffer as a consequence of our present actions. In his words: "our inability to think seriously about future generations is linked to our inability to broaden the scope of our present interests and to give consideration to those who remain excluded from development."²⁴ In effect, the only question that remains within such a purview is the "maximization of profits,"²⁵ or more precisely, the *maximization* of present and immediate individual gains, with no regard for both the synchronic and diachronic "others" who are effectually invisible from this exclusive and excluding vision. In fact, there are times when a person motivated by the maximization of profits does not also admit its impact on one's country, community, family, or self.

Driven by this logic, this dynamic of objectification-consumption-maximization naturally continues into disposal once the highest possible level of satisfaction or the maximization of pleasure and profit is obtained, thereby completing the matrix of the "throw-away culture:" objection-consumption-maximization-disposal. At the point of maximum satiety, there is no more reason to keep an object or continue consuming it. Thus, the only thing that remains to be done to it is to dispose of it, to throw it away.

The irony though is that while satiety is eventually reached for the objects that are consumed, and even becomes quicker to attain as consumption goes on according to the "law of diminishing returns," satiety when it comes to the act of consumption itself is never reached and the urge to consume only intensifies. As Francis keenly observes: "Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them."²⁶ Left on its own, this concern to maximize profits and pleasures does not wane, but turns into an unbridled obsession, an unquenchable compulsion to consume. The Pope underlines: "The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything, which stands in the way of increased

²³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 54.

²⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 162.

²⁵ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 195.

²⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 209.

profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.”²⁷

Thus, the whole dynamic of objectification-consumption-maximization-disposal takes on the face today, not only of the proliferation of disposable materials that end up polluting the planet, but even of human persons who are treated like disposable objects that are initially considered useful but end up as garbage to be discarded. As the Pope observed in *Amoris Laetitia*, “We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye.”²⁸ In this way, this “throw-away culture” inevitably leads to the double and joint degradation, both of the environment and of human relationships, for the benefit of those with the power and resources, but at the expense of minorities and excluded peoples. At the same time, Francis goes on to say, the tragedy is that “sooner or later, those who use others end up being used themselves, manipulated and discarded by that same mindset.”²⁹ Thus, the countless number of victims of this throw-away culture, which Poust corroborates:

It doesn’t require much imagination or study to recognize that Pope Francis’ definition of modern society as a “throwaway culture” is spot on. We live in a world where everything is seen as disposable, replaceable or temporary, and overflowing landfills aren’t the only obvious signs. We can look at figurative pathways strewn with broken relationships, forgotten people, abandoned beliefs, and dilapidated dreams to find the far-reaching effects of the throwaway mentality.³⁰

While “the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth,”³¹ the inner world within each person is becoming more and more polluted with highly traumatic and damaging experiences of being used and then thrown away. This generates a deep sense of personal lack and emptiness, which people try to numb with a similarly vicious, self-perpetuating, and escalating spiral of “use and throw” that never reaches satisfaction or contentment. Brancatelli affirms that “When the spiritual void created by the throwaway culture is filled with even more material goods—the result of ‘compulsive consumerism’—people become aggressive, anxious, and fixated on superficialities. Over time, these characteristics and the socio-economic conditions accompanying them give rise to a spiritual and

²⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 56.

²⁸ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ MaryDeTurris Poust, “Pope Francis’ guide to avoiding a ‘throwaway culture,’” *Our Sunday Visitor*, 21 August 2013, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/10927/Pope-Francis-guide-to-avoiding-a-throwaway-culture.aspx> (accessed 1 May 2018).

³¹ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 21.

ethical crisis that reinforces the consumerist lifestyle.”³² In a world of limited resources and unlimited wants, this can easily generate into worse problems. As Francis notes:

The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own, and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. (...) Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction.³³

Indeed, in its most extreme manifestations, exclusion can take on radical forms like apartheid and violence against targeted sectors of society or even the ejection, elimination, and extermination of excluded peoples in ruthless forms of genocide. Moreover, as a paradigm that comes to be translated, not only into personal lifestyles but also into societal structures, “throw-away culture” literally kills people, especially on the systemic level, albeit at times through a slow and almost imperceptible process. As Massaro says: “Today’s warped and imbalanced economic system is responsible for the death of many people-victims of poverty and exploitation around the world.”³⁴ Hence, the Pope admonishes us that: “Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.”³⁵ Meanwhile, the apathy and indifference attendant to this culture of waste cloaks such deaths with a semblance of normalcy, banality, and inevitability:

Nevertheless men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the “culture of waste.” If a computer breaks it is a tragedy, but poverty, the needs, and dramas of so many people end up being considered normal. If on a winter’s night, here on the Via Ottaviano—for example—someone dies, that is not news. If there are children in so many parts of the world who have nothing to eat, that is not news, it seems normal. It cannot be so! And yet these things enter into normality: that some homeless people should freeze to death on the street — this doesn’t make news. On the contrary, when the stock market drops 10 points in some cities, it constitutes a tragedy. Someone who dies is not news, but lowering income by 10 points is a tragedy! In this way people are thrown aside as if they were trash.³⁶

³² Robert Brancatelli, “*Laudato Si’* and A Spirituality of Resiliency,” *Journal of Management for Global Sustainability* 4/1 (2016): 4.

³³ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 204.

³⁴ Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 145.

³⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.

³⁶ Francis, *General Audience on UN Environment Day*.

Culture of Mercy: Antidote to the “Throw-Away Culture”

In the face of this prevailing culture, Pope Francis invites believers to promote a counter-culture that will arrest and overturn its menacing effects, saying: “We are called to promote a culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters.”³⁷ The theme of mercy indeed emerges as one of the most important, if not the most important theme of this Pontificate, embodied in his chosen motto, “*Miserando atque eligendo*.” Most significantly, in 2015, Francis called for the celebration of an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy that began on 8 December of that year and ended on 20 November 2016. Thus, Cahill notes that “For Pope Francis, mercy is a principle, a virtue, and a basic stance in life.” and she fittingly describes mercy as “the keynote of the pastoral, theological, and ecclesial approach of Pope Francis.”³⁸ Similarly, Dorr says that “For previous popes the key word in Catholic social teaching was ‘solidarity.’ Francis, too, sees this concept as crucial. But for him, in everything he says and writes, the words which take pride of place are ‘mercy’ and ‘joy.’”³⁹ Meanwhile, Vignini concurs, stating that “The keyword of his programme, which signposts the way, is sealed in the title: mercy.”⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the theme of mercy is not only a matter of personal preference for the Pope. It comes from his pastoral conviction about what he believes is most needed by the Church at this particular point in history, which he often calls “a time of mercy.” In declaring the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Francis said: “The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters.”⁴¹ At the conclusion of the same Jubilee of Mercy, he made it clear that the time of mercy does not cease with it, but continues after its closure: “The Jubilee now ends and the Holy Door is closed. But the door of mercy of our heart continues to remain wide open.”⁴² Thus, he continued to extend the summons: “Now is the time to unleash the

³⁷ Francis, Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, 20 November 2016, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20161120_misericordia-et-misera.html (accessed 1 May 2018), 20.

³⁸ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Dignity, Dilemmas, Discernment and Mercy,” *Doctrine and Life: Religious Life Review* 68 (2018): 18.

³⁹ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: From Leo XIII to Pope Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 392.

⁴⁰ Guiliano Vignini, ed. *Francis: The Church of Mercy* (Bengaluru: Asian Trading Corporation, 2014), xvi.

⁴¹ Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11 April 2015, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html (accessed 1 May 2018), 10.

⁴² Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*, 16.

creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace.”⁴³ Later in the same document, he would reiterate: “This is the time of mercy,”⁴⁴ a point he had been emphasizing from as early as July 2013 when he first mentioned it during his flight from Rio de Janeiro, just a few months after his election, tracing the roots of his conviction all the way back to John Paul II:

I believe that this is the season of mercy. (...) And I believe that this is a kairos: this time is a kairos of mercy. But John Paul II had the first intuition of this, when he began with Faustina Kowalska, the Divine Mercy... He had something, he had intuited that this was a need in our time.

Francis would expound on this further in an interview with Andrea Tornielli, which has been published into a book entitled, *The Name of God is Mercy*. Here he says that the time has come for the Church, as mother, to actively reach out to those who are excluded by society. Moreover, he also emphasizes his use of the Greek word *kairós*, a noun that appears in the New Testament to denote a special, favourable time that is different from ordinary time (*chronos*):

Yes, I believe that this is a time of mercy. The Church is showing her maternal side, her motherly face, to a humanity that is wounded. She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her doors, she looks for them on the streets, she gathers them in, she embraces them, she takes care of them, she makes them feel loved. And so, as I said, and I am ever more convinced of it, this is a *kairós*, our era is a *kairós* of mercy, a time of opportunity.⁴⁵

On the timeliness of mercy today, Francis again invokes John Paul II who noted that “The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy.”⁴⁶ It lauds competence and independence, while being at the receiving end of mercy is regarded as helplessness and weakness. Francis agrees, saying that “Today we add further to the tragedy by considering our illness, our sins, to be incurable, things that cannot be healed or forgiven. We lack the actual concrete experience of mercy.”⁴⁷ Thus bereft of a personal experience of the mercy of God, it becomes difficult for people to share it. In this way, the need for mercy becomes truly urgent and important, not only on the part of those who suffer obvious material poverty but also on the part of the apparently privileged yet spiritually poor. O’Murchu says of Francis: “When he says that the church needs to heal wounds and warm hearts, he is addressing both the body and

⁴³ Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*, 18.

⁴⁴ Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*, 21.

⁴⁵ Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy* (New York: Random House, 2016), 6.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 2. Quoted by Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11.

⁴⁷ Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 16.

the soul, the exterior and the interior of the human person, and addressing both those who suffer material deprivation and those who suffer spiritual deprivation. The two are inherently related.”⁴⁸

In *Misericordia et Misera*, Francis bewails how the present “culture of extreme individualism” has taken away the sense of solidarity and concern for other people.⁴⁹ At the same time, he points to solidarity as “the utmost response of mercy” in the face of these ongoing attacks against the dignity of human persons.⁵⁰ This needful response, the Pope insists, should not consist of scattered or sporadic projects, but of stable and purposive initiatives, in order to transform persons and cultures. As Vatican observer, John Allen, notes: “Francis has implored Catholics of all stripes to imitate his example of reaching out to people alienated from the faith, embracing victims of the ‘throwaway culture:’ the poor, the elderly, unemployed youth, immigrants and refugees.” Likewise, he is quick to add, in line with the Pope’s thinking: “Doing so requires sustained effort, including rethinking stale pastoral practices, launching new initiatives and generally being willing to think creatively.”⁵¹

In other words, the response of mercy must not be limited to random acts at the liminal level but needs to be sustained in order to penetrate into the level of culture and be able to address the problem at its very roots, following the time-honored principle *sanatio in radice*. In other words, mercy needs to become a counter-culture to effectively arrest and replace the prevailing “throw-away culture.” This is very much in accord with the Pope’s personal conviction that it is by transforming culture that integral and authentic development of society can begin. He says: “An evangelized popular culture contains values of faith and solidarity capable of encouraging the development of a more just and believing society, and possesses a particular wisdom which ought to be gratefully acknowledged.”⁵² As Turner observes regarding Pope Francis’ unique pastoral pedagogy: “Under the additional influence of Argentina’s particular brand of liberation theology, Francis added [to Catholic Social Teaching] the element of developing a people through its culture.”⁵³

Nevertheless, we also note that while Francis is of the persuasion that mercy is particularly relevant for our present time, he also steadfastly maintains that mercy

⁴⁸ Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Inclusivity: A Gospel Mandate* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2016), 2.

⁴⁹ Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*, 18.

⁵⁰ Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*, 19.

⁵¹ John Allen, Jr., *The Francis Miracle: Inside the Transformation of the Pope and the Church* (New York: Time Books, 2015), 226.

⁵² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 68.

⁵³ Barrett Turner, “Pacis Progressio: How Francis’ Four Principles Develop Catholic Social Teaching into Catholic Social Praxis,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 6 (2017): 128.

is perennially pertinent, even paramount to Christianity for all time. In the same interview with Tornielli, he describes it as the preeminent divine attribute: “Mercy is real; it is the first attribute of God.”⁵⁴ Likewise, in response to the question of why God does not tire of forgiving sins, he repeats: “Because he is God, because he is mercy, and because mercy is the first attribute of God. Mercy is the name of God.”⁵⁵ Again, he quotes his predecessors to establish his continuity with them on this matter of great importance:⁵⁶ John Paul II who described mercy as “the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer”⁵⁷ and Benedict XVI who declared that “Indeed, mercy is the central nucleus of the Gospel message; it is the very name of God, the Face with which he revealed himself in the Old Covenant and fully in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of creative and redemptive Love.”⁵⁸

For Francis, then, mercy as a culture should not only be true of Christians in our own time but of Christians for all time. He describes mercy as “God’s identity card,” professing that “For me, this really is the Lord’s identity.”⁵⁹ In line with this, he goes on to state that since mercy is not only one of the actions but the principal attribute of God, “it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are.”⁶⁰ As the theme that he chose for the Jubilee Year of Mercy goes: *Misericordes sicut Pater*, “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). Moreover, he calls attention to the fact that Jesus “made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith,”⁶¹ making it at the same time “the criteria upon which we will be judged,”⁶² in reference to the scene of the Final Judgment in Matthew 25. As such, mercy also serves as the standard by which “we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples.”⁶³ Mercy, then, for Pope Francis, is the distinctive hallmark, the distinguishing culture of Christianity. It is “the very foundation of the Church’s life”⁶⁴ and the measure of her credibility.⁶⁵

⁵⁴ Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 62.

⁵⁵ Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 85.

⁵⁶ See Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 7.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 30 November 1980, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html (accessed 1 May 2018), 13.

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli on the Second Sunday of Easter* [Divine Mercy Sunday] 2008, 30 March 2008, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_reg_20080330.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

⁵⁹ Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 9.

⁶⁰ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 9.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 15.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 10.

⁶⁵ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 10, 12, 25.

“Culture of Mercy”: Manifestations and Matrix

The matrix of this “culture of mercy” aptly begins with the gaze of contemplation, which is the opposite of the relativizing and objectifying look that marks the beginning of the “throw-away culture.” McNamara defines contemplation as “a long, loving look at the real.”⁶⁶ In other words, to contemplate is to give careful, respectful, and reverent attention to the presence of something or someone before us. It is to behold not only human beings but all creatures in their unique reality and intrinsic value, which people can fail to notice or take into account when they are interested only in pleasure or profit. According to Pope Francis, “We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God’s plan.”⁶⁷

On a similar note, White states that, “Contemplation in its best and highest form means looking upon something or someone with love. A contemplative awareness is a loving awareness, and it has an instinctive corollary: to treat what is loved with respect and to cherish it.”⁶⁸ Accordingly, a contemplative person does not objectify or destroy but admires and respects what is contemplated. Pope Francis gives an example of this in *Amoris Laetitia* when he notes: “The aesthetic experience of love is expressed in that ‘gaze’ which contemplates other persons as ends in themselves, even if they are infirm, elderly or physically unattractive.”⁶⁹ Even in such a situation, where the relative utility of the person is apparently diminished or even exhausted, contemplative eyes will see, not an object to use or to dispose if no longer useful, but a person to value and to love. Ellsberg accurately describes the root of what the Pontiff is trying to propose, saying, “Pope Francis lays out a new vision for Christians in the world. But it is not simply a social manifesto. It is a profoundly spiritual vision.”⁷⁰

Thus, the first step of the “culture of mercy” is to “broaden our vision”⁷¹ from the myopia of utilitarianism and consumerism in order to see the intrinsic value of persons and things once again and not merely their relative value in reference to us. In effect, this loving way of seeing enables us to be content without having to own or consume, to be happy without needlessly hurting or destroying. With such a vision of

⁶⁶ William McNamara as quoted by Walter Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long, Loving Look at the Real,” *Church*, 5 (1989): 14-17.

⁶⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 86.

⁶⁸ Teresa White, “Seeing with Pure Eyes,” *The Way*, 54/4 (October 2015): 109.

⁶⁹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 128.

⁷⁰ Robert Ellsberg, “Pope Francis: Care for Creation,” *Maryknoll Magazine*, 1 November 2016, <https://maryknollmagazine.org/2016/11/pope-francis-care-creation/> (accessed 1 May 2018). Emphasis added.

⁷¹ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 112.

the world, Francis says, “Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption.”⁷² According to Ellsberg, such a vision entails “a profound conversion of values: a new understanding of our relation to God’s Creation, both the earth and its creatures and our fellow human beings, especially the poor, who are the first victims of environmental degradation.”⁷³

An important aspect of this contemplation, however, is that it also involves, as an indispensable element, the contemplation of God in prayer in order to become deeply aware of the mercy of God, who is Mercy himself, in one’s life. As Pope Francis says, “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it.”⁷⁴ In light of this, Francis says that “The more conscious we are of our wretchedness and our sins, the more we experience the love and infinite mercy of God among us, and the more capable we are of looking upon the many ‘wounded’ we meet along the way with acceptance and mercy.”⁷⁵ Thus, there is a need to become aware of this mercy that “always precedes us, accompanies us, and remains with us, despite our sin”⁷⁶ and to allow this mercy to become the core of our existence. This necessitates listening to the Word of God in nature, in history, in our own life, in the Scriptures, and above all in the person of Jesus Christ. “In this way, it will be possible to contemplate God’s mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle.”⁷⁷

Thereupon, the contemplative experience of mercy enables the discovery of the presence of God in all creatures, especially in human persons who are created in his own image, whom we are then led to treat with respect, awe, and love.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, White observes that “It is so easy, preoccupied as we often are with our own pressing concerns, to miss the radiance of God shining in creation. ...it is only when our eyes are cleansed of triviality, when we see with pure eyes, that we are moved to take off our shoes, sensing that we stand on holy ground.”⁷⁹ Thus, there is a need to deliberately turn away from the throwaway culture and fix our eyes on the mercy of God in our life. Meanwhile, it is only divine mercy itself that can enable our eyes to behold its presence. In this way, contemplation is at the same time a matter of decision and of grace.

⁷² Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 222.

⁷³ Ellsberg, “Pope Francis: Care for Creation.”

⁷⁴ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 2.

⁷⁵ Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 67.

⁷⁶ Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*, 5.

⁷⁷ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 13.

⁷⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 88, 233-34.

⁷⁹ White, “Seeing with Pure Eyes,” 106.

According to the Pope, we either have this contemplative disposition of looking at the mercy of God and looking with mercy on our fellow creatures or else we are overcome by the consumerist outlook that pushes people to plunder the environment and to use other people. Subsequently, our way of looking at the world and at other creatures shapes our interaction and relationship with them. Shiffman warns us that “To the extent that we lose the ability to see and feel [the goodness of each creature and of creation as a whole], we lose our humanity and end up destroying both ourselves and the created order to which we belong.”⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the Pope writes in *Laudato Si'*: “If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up *spontaneously*.”⁸¹

Unfortunately, the outlook of many people today, especially with the influence of social media, is not only utilitarian, materialistic, and consumeristic but also covetous, prying, and voyeuristic. Pope Francis observes for instance how people today are “paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people’s lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity.”⁸² The capacity to behold anything without feeling jealousy, avarice or inordinate desire has become rare, and yet as Younger points out, “our experience of nature is integral to God’s exuberant outpouring of grace into our lives...”⁸³ How then can people recognize and respond to God’s grace in their life when they seem to have lost the very ability to experience it through contemplation? Nevertheless, a change of perspective remains possible, requiring no less than a whole paradigm shift, a pivotal and decisive step within the process of cultural conversion that Francis wants to set in motion:

We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full. Jesus taught us this attitude when he invited us to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, or when seeing the rich young man and knowing his restlessness, “he looked at him with love” (Mk 10:21). He was completely present to everyone and to everything, and in this way he showed us the way to overcome that

⁸⁰ Shiffman, “Between the Knower and the Known,” 17.

⁸¹ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 11. Emphasis added.

⁸² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169.

⁸³ Paul Younger, “Ignatian Spirituality and the Ecological Vision of *Laudato Si'*” *The Way*, 54/4 (2015): 62.

unhealthy anxiety which makes us superficial, aggressive, and compulsive consumers.⁸⁴

Zimmermann highlights the importance of this merciful way of looking in our present society, which he describes as having “a culture of looking the other way,” alluding to the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan who both “saw” the wounded man but chose to ignore him. Their indifference for him is an ironic form of blindness, reflecting the apathy of many today to the sufferings of others: “The priest and Levite are not blind. They see – and they do not see. In our culture of looking the other way, we have precisely this paradoxical correlation. We see and we do not see.”⁸⁵ In contrast to this, the Samaritan also “saw” the wounded man but “he does not pass by. He allows himself to be inwardly affected; he interrupts his travels and helps.”⁸⁶ Or as the Gospel itself narrates: “and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine...” (Lk 10: 33-34). Going deeper, Zimmermann connects this to the philosophy of Levinas and describes the encounter between the Samaritan and the victim as

the face, the countenance of the other that speaks to me in its pre-linguistic language, in its otherness, and more still in its helplessness and need. Only the intentional relationship to the other allows me to become “I.” The “neighbor” – like myself – according to Lévinas – can “develop not through recognition, but only through seeing and touching.” The encounter precedes the ontology (interestingly with regards to our double law), for Lévinas that simultaneously includes an epiphany, an encounter with God. In the other, I become aware of a trace that always moves past, of ‘Godliness’ (illéite); the love of God and the love of one’s neighbor converge in the encounter with the other.⁸⁷

This brings us now to the second aspect of the dynamics of the “culture of mercy” where contemplation leads to *compassion*. Indeed, the nexus between contemplation and compassion is shown not only in this story of the Good Samaritan but in many other Gospel episodes where Jesus himself experiences mercy, as well as in the figure of the Father in the parable of the prodigal son.⁸⁸ Likewise, in the Hebrew

⁸⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 226.

⁸⁵ R. Zimmermann, “The Etho-Poietic of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37): The Ethics of Seeing in a Culture of Looking the Other Way,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29/1 (2008): 289.

⁸⁶ Zimmermann, “The Etho-Poietic of the Parable of the Good Samaritan,” 273.

⁸⁷ Zimmermann, “The Etho-Poietic of the Parable of the Good Samaritan,” 280.

⁸⁸ See for instance the following texts: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36); “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had *compassion* on them and healed their sick” (Mt 14:14); “When he went ashore he *saw* a great crowd, and he had *compassion* on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk 6:34); And when the Lord saw her, he had *compassion* on her and said to her, “Do not weep” (Lk 7:13); “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt *compassion*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Lk 15:20).

Scriptures, this vital link is expressed, although sometimes indirectly formulated, in various instances. On occasion, it can even appear as if contemplation and compassion occurs at exactly the same time or refers to one and the same reality.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Francis elaborates the meaning of the word *σπλαγχνίζομαι* in the Biblical context:

God Incarnate let himself be moved by human wretchedness, by our need, by our suffering. The Greek verb that indicates this compassion is *σπλαγχνίζομαι* [splanchnízomai, ed.], which derives from the word that indicates internal organs or the mother's womb. It is similar to the love of a father and mother who are profoundly moved by their own son; it is a visceral love. God loves us in this way, with compassion and mercy. Jesus does not look at reality from the outside, without letting himself be moved, as if he were taking a picture. He lets himself get involved. This kind of compassion is needed today to conquer the globalization of indifference.⁹⁰

Compassion therefore is not just the fleeting emotion of pity easily doused by token acts of giving. This is what the Pope calls "worldly compassion," which he says is "completely useless."⁹¹ In contrast to this, genuine compassion involves the synergy of feeling and action or as O'Murchu describes it, it is "what one *feels* compelled to *do* and not only the horror one feels."⁹² Compassion then refers to the moment of conversion towards solidarity for the other that serves as the bridge between awareness and action, not only on the personal level, but on the ecclesial,⁹³ communal⁹⁴ and global⁹⁵ levels. Compassion then more properly refers to a conversion

⁸⁹ Refer to the following instances: "And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin... Then Joseph hurried out, for his *compassion* grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep" (Gen 43:29-30); "But the Lord was gracious to them and had *compassion* on them, and *he turned toward them*, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now" (2 Kgs 13:23); "Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me" (Is 63:15); "No *eye* pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of *compassion* for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born" (Ezk 16:5); "*Compassion* is hidden from my eyes" (Hos 13:14).

⁹⁰ Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 92. He gives a similar explanation in *Misericordiae Vultus*, 6: "In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a 'visceral' love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy."

⁹¹ Francis, *Address to Young People in the Sports Field of the University of Santo Tomas*, 18 January 2015, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/docume_nts/papa-francesco_20150118_sr_lanka-filippine-incontro-giovani.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

⁹² O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 41.

⁹³ Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 26, 32.

⁹⁴ Cf. Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 219.

⁹⁵ Cf. Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 5.

of the intellect and affect which engenders a reorientation of the entire constellation of values that governs one's choices and actions, without which, even well-meaning efforts to be of help or to amend accustomed ways would be hard to sustain and are likely to bear little fruit.

In this way, compassion serves as the inverse of consumption in that it is sincerely concerned with the other, seeing both the other's intrinsic worth and the other's suffering, rather than being interested only in whatever the other can yield for pleasure or profit. The driving impulse of compassion is to give, whereas the basic compulsion of consumption is to take. At the same time, Francis tells us, this conversion to compassion involves the growth and cultivation of a corresponding "spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living."⁹⁶ This spirituality would then serve as the foundation that roots and the impetus that propels action and the resulting synergy embodies the harmony of the "three languages" that Francis spoke of when he addressed the youth gathered in the University of Santo Tomas:

It is to use the three languages: the language of the mind, the language of the heart, and the language of the hands. All three together, harmoniously: what you think, you feel, and you do. Your information descends to the heart, moves it, and gets translated into action. And all this in a harmonious way: I think what I feel and do, I feel what I think and what I do, and I do what I think and what I feel. The three languages.⁹⁷

Contemplation-compassion therefore leads to *care*, not only in the affective sense but in the active sense. As Francis says, "This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern,"⁹⁸ that inevitably translates into concrete and consistent efforts to promote the welfare of the other or what Gómez would call "affective and effective mercy."⁹⁹ O'Murchu expounds: "The transformation of the heart, which might also be described as the contemplative gaze, asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish."¹⁰⁰ Akin to what Jeremiah meant by what he described as "fire in my bones" (Jer 20:9), this kind of experience cannot help but be translated into action. As such, the well-grounded mysticism of Francis, where contemplation issues into compassion, is ultimately incarnated into concrete and substantial actions to improve the dire conditions of the poor and of the environment. This effort to continuously better their situation is now

⁹⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 216.

⁹⁷ Francis, *Address to Young People in the Sports Field of the University of Santo Tomas*. 18 January 2015.

⁹⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 199.

⁹⁹ Fausto Gómez, *A Pilgrim's Notes: Mercy, Love and Holiness* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2017), 4.

¹⁰⁰ O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 44.

the antithesis of the destructive dynamic of maximization that leads to its progressive deterioration. Another word that the Pope uses in referring to compassion - which cannot but become active - is love or charity, about which he says:

Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care... makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity, which affects not only relationships between individuals but also “macro-relationships, social, economic, and political ones.”¹⁰¹

Hence, care takes on the form not only of “little everyday gestures” on the personal level and of “larger strategies” on the societal level. Rather, all these promote and contribute towards creating a “culture of care” which will be capable of addressing the “throw-away culture.”¹⁰² As Ellsberg notes: “In place of such a culture, Pope Francis lays out a different vision: a culture of care and interdependence that fashions bridges instead of walls.”¹⁰³ This solidarity according to Francis is “more than a few sporadic acts of generosity” but “a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”¹⁰⁴

In line with this, he calls on people “to rethink solidarity’ no longer as simply assistance for the poorest, but as a *global rethinking of the whole system*, as a quest for ways to reform it and correct it in a way consistent with the fundamental human rights of all human beings.”¹⁰⁵ This is also what Francis means by the concept of “integral ecology” that he earnestly proposes: “An integral ecology... supposes an ecology of mother earth: taking care of mother earth; with a human ecology: taking *care* of ourselves; and a social ecology, in the strong sense of the word.”¹⁰⁶ The word “integral” here emphasizes the fact that genuine care is seamless, an interconnected reality: “to ‘cultivate and care’ encompasses not only the relationship between us and the environment, between man and creation, it also regards human relationships.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 231.

¹⁰² Cf. Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 231.

¹⁰³ Robert Ellsberg, “Pope Francis: Care for Creation.”

¹⁰⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ Francis, *Address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation*, 25 May 2013, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130525_centesimus-annus-pro-pontifice_en.html (accessed 1 May 2018). Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁶ Francis, *Address at Meeting with Civil Authorities in Bolivia*, 8 September 2015, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150708_bolivia-autorita-ci-vili.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹⁰⁷ Francis, *Meeting with Catholic Charitable Organizations who are active in the ongoing crisis in Syria at the Meeting of Pontifical Council “Cor Unum,”* 5 June 2013, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_corunum-siria_en.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

Likewise, this “culture of care” is also the “revolution of tenderness” that Francis pushes for in the Church, declaring that: “True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.”¹⁰⁸ Such tenderness, rooted in a contemplative experience of the Lord’s own tenderness towards us, impels the response of bringing the very same tenderness of God to those in need. Francis notes: “It is from contemplation, from a strong friendship with the Lord that the capacity is born in us to live and to bring the love of God, his mercy, his tenderness, to others.”¹⁰⁹ For him, the very mercy of God is what gives the culture of mercy the revolutionary power that it has, capable of supplanting the throw away culture. He says: “There are so many people waiting for us to go out and meet them and look at them with the tenderness that we have experienced and received from our relationship with God. That is where our power lies: not in our ideals and in our personal projects, but rather in the strength of his mercy which transforms and gives us life.”¹¹⁰

Yet another word that Pope Francis often uses that captures this dynamic of contemplation-compassion-care is “encounter,” which refers both to the encounter with the mercy of God embodied in the person of Jesus Christ and the encounter with others. He describes encounter in terms of a Gospel imperative “to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction.”¹¹¹ Once again, the emphasis on depth and continuity comes up since the program here of Pope Francis consists not merely of scattered and sporadic encounters, but “a peaceful and multifaceted *culture* of encounter.”¹¹² This “culture of encounter,” or “culture of dialogue” as he calls it also, is an entire “spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare” through which “our hearts are opened wide to the Lord’s greatest and most beautiful gifts.”¹¹³

As such, every authentic human encounter for Francis is at the same time an encounter with God so that he says, “Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God.”¹¹⁴ These two aspects of encounter,

¹⁰⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88.

¹⁰⁹ Francis, *Angelus of 21 September 2013*, 21 September 2013, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130721_en.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹¹⁰ Francis, *Address to Participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Augustinian Recollects*, 20 October 2016, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161020_agostiniani-recolletti.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹¹¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88.

¹¹² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 220. Emphasis added.

¹¹³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 272.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

horizontal and vertical, are inseparable from each other. Together they make up one single encounter: an encounter with God which also means an encounter with others at the same time. “We can no longer divide prayer, the encounter with God in the Sacraments, from listening to the other, closeness to his life, especially to his wounds,”¹¹⁵ the Pope says. Encountering God necessarily entails encountering our fellow human beings. In the words of Francis: “At the heart of the Gospel of mercy, the encounter and acceptance of others are intertwined with the encounter and acceptance of God himself.”¹¹⁶

Thus, while the “throw-away culture” builds up walls and divisions, the dynamic of contemplation-compassion-care issues into *communion*, which becomes the ultimate reversal of the disposal of the objectified at the end of the “throw-away culture” or the culture of exclusion. Following up on Francis’ evocative metaphor of the Church as “field hospital,” Cavanaugh describes this love of the Church as a charity that does not discriminate, like a good hospital that is open to everyone.¹¹⁷ At this point, the habitual practice of care already turns into “a sharing that becomes a way of life,”¹¹⁸ imbibed solidarity becomes a culture that by nature includes everyone and excludes no one. “When these elements come together,” Francis tells us, “there is social friendship, fraternal friendship and a culture of encounter that protects us from any form of the throw-away culture.”¹¹⁹

In the Pope’s words: “Communion shows that charity is not merely about helping others, but is a dimension that permeates the whole of life and breaks down all those barriers of individualism which prevent us from encountering one another.”¹²⁰ Theologically speaking, communion is achieved above all by communion with the Blessed Trinity who is the fullness of Communion, which then has inevitable and irreversible repercussions on the remainder of one’s life. In concrete, this is realized

¹¹⁵ Francis, *Angelus of 26 October 2014*, 26 October 2014, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20141026.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹¹⁶ Francis, *Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 9 September 2015, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹¹⁷ William Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital: The Church’s Engagement with a Wounded World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 3.

¹¹⁸ Francis, *Message for the First World Day of the Poor*, 13 June 2017, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/papa-francesco_20170613_messaggio-i-giornatamondiale-poveri-2017.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹¹⁹ Francis, *Address to Participants in the World Congress of the ‘Scholas Occurrentes’ Pontifical Foundation*, 29 June 2016, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/may/documents/papa-francesco_20160529_scholas-occurrentes.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹²⁰ Francis, *Address to Participants in the Meeting on the Fifth Anniversary of the Haiti Earthquake*, 10 January 2015, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150110_v-anniversario-terremoto-haiti.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

by communion with Christ who then leads us to communion not only with the Trinity but also with our fellow human beings, especially the poor. As Francis says, “when we put Christ at the centre of our life, we ourselves don’t become the centre! The more that you unite yourself to Christ and he becomes the centre of your life, the more he leads you out of yourself, leads you from making yourself the centre and opens you to others.”¹²¹

For the Pope, an authentic encounter is directly contiguous and concomitant with solidarity or communion. When a real meeting occurs, involving truthful recognition through contemplation, compassion towards the other, and a response of genuine care, communion also happens. As O’Murchu expounds, “Gospel-based compassion tolerates no outsiders. It embraces and seeks to bring in all who are marginalized, oppressed, and excluded from empowering fellowship.”¹²² In line with this, Francis tells us that “The culture of encounter should naturally lead to a culture of solidarity.”¹²³ This is what enables little acts of heroism and the daily following of the commandment of love, “not on the basis of ideas or concepts, but rather on the basis of genuine interpersonal encounter.”¹²⁴ Thus, when the dynamic of contemplation-compassion-care truly occurs, communion grows and eventually excludes all forms of exclusion. As Gómez explains, “Mercy towards the unfortunate (*miser cordia*), compassion (*compassion, cum passio*) or sympathy for others are opposed to apathy and antipathy.”¹²⁵ The complete matrix of the culture of mercy is captured in this statement of Francis:

A person who sees things as they truly are and sympathizes with pain and sorrow is capable of touching life’s depths and finding authentic happiness. He or she is consoled, not by the world but by Jesus. Such persons are unafraid to share in the suffering of others; they do not flee from painful situations. They discover the meaning of life by coming to the aid of those who suffer, understanding their anguish and bringing relief. They sense that the other is flesh of our flesh, and are not afraid to draw near, even to touch their wounds. They feel compassion for others in such a way that all distance vanishes.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Francis, Address to Participants in the Pilgrimage of Catechists on the Occasion of the Year of Faith and the International Congress on Catechesis, 27 September 2013, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130927_pellegrinaggio-catechisti.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹²² O’Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 44.

¹²³ Francis, Address to Students at Fr. Félix Varela Cultural Centre, 20 September 2015, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150920_cuba-giovani.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹²⁴ Francis, Address at the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, 9 September 2015, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹²⁵ Gómez, *A Pilgrim’s Notes*, 5.

¹²⁶ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World *Gaudete et Exsultate*,

By his Incarnation, Jesus himself is the exemplar par excellence of communion with all humanity, as he made himself “like to us in all things except sin.”¹²⁷ We need to note however that this solidarity of Jesus is oriented in a particular way towards identification with the poor, the rejected and the marginalized. In other words, while Christian communion excludes no one, it leans in a special way towards the excluded. By this, it does not become exclusive but more inclusive in that it is now able to include those who were previously not included. Indeed, it is with them that Christ identified himself in a particular way, not just becoming human but “taking the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7). As such, Francis recalls that “Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf. Mt 25:40). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth.”¹²⁸ The orientation, then, of Christian solidarity towards the excluded has important implications for our own understanding and praxis of communion. As Reiser expressed it:

Divine solidarity with human nature may be both consoling and uplifting, and it may indeed lead us to seek moral and spiritual perfection: God becomes human so that human beings might become God, that is, sharers in the divine nature. But when divine solidarity is specified in terms of solidarity with the poor, the excluded, the crucified ones of this world, then the mystery before us is truly wondrous and intensely challenging. Wondrous because God has joined the history of suffering so intimately: challenging because we now have to make some important choices and engage in careful, maybe even painful discernment.¹²⁹

For Reiser, Jesus Christ is not just the quintessential human person but likewise “the quintessential throwaway.”¹³⁰ In this manner, to be solidary with Christ is to be in communion particularly with those whom the world considers as throwaways, the people who are “rejected by the builders” who become in Christ the cornerstone of God’s new people. Hence, while we are called to communion with everyone, it is with the people whom the world throws out as garbage that we should expressly endeavor to be in communion with, after the manner of Jesus. This is the literal meaning of compassion, which is to “suffer with.” It entails not only “sharing” in

19 March 2018, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html (accessed 1 May 2018), 76. Emphasis added.

¹²⁷ Cf. Heb 4:15. Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 7 December 1965, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed 2 May 2017), 22.

¹²⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 209.

¹²⁹ William Reiser, *Jesus in Solidarity with His People: A Theologian Looks at Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 7.

¹³⁰ Reiser, *Jesus in Solidarity with His People*, 118.

the sense of the rich giving to the poor, but also their partaking of whatever the poor are going through. As O'Murchu describes it, "Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human."¹³¹

Francis declares: "In fidelity to the Gospel, and in response to the urgent needs of the present time, we are called to reach out to those who find themselves in the existential peripheries of our societies and to show particular solidarity with the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters."¹³² This proactive and purposive inclusion directed specifically towards those who are excluded by society is the height of the "culture of mercy" that would be capable of undoing the selective and systematic exclusion brought by the "throwaway culture." This now is the Pontiff's main project, which is more than just another aid campaign but a matter of personal and societal conversion according to Malone:

There is no doubt whatsoever that one of the major effects of the arrival of this pope has been to turn the world's attention to the poor. This is not in order to increase charitable donations, but to effect a total change in society and its perception of itself and in the Church and its perception of itself. He has repeated again and again that he wants the poor to be part of society, part of the Church. And not just part of the Church. He wants a Church of the poor and a poor Church.¹³³

As such, going out to the "peripheries" means stepping out of our comfort zones to be one with others, particularly with those in need. The Pope exhorts: "Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but *all of us* are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel."¹³⁴ Heille comments on what he styles as the Pontiff's "signature invitation," explaining that "As Pope Francis issues his signature invitation for all believers to embrace a vocation of missionary discipleship at the peripheries, those peripheries can be broadly defined to include the home, the workplace, the many institutions that constitute the profit and nonprofit sectors of the economy, as well as political entities from local to regional to national and global. At every periphery, the church wishes to attend to the human person and especially to the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized."¹³⁵ It is by going

¹³¹ O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 44.

¹³² Francis, *Message on the Occasion of the Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, 4 October 2013, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/messages/pont-messages/2013/index_en.htm (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹³³ Mary Malone, "Some Definitive 'No's,'" in *The Francis Factor: A New Departure*, ed. John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2014), 18-19.

¹³⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20. Emphasis added.

¹³⁵ Gregory Heille, *The Preaching of Pope Francis* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2015), 30.

to these peripheries in the spirit of solidarity that the very marginalization by which these peripheries have been created can be overcome by communion. Francis says:

We live in a culture of conflict, a culture of fragmentation, a culture in which I throw away what is of no use to me, a culture of waste. (...) However, we must go out to meet them, and with our faith we must create a “culture of encounter”, a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak with those who think differently, as well as those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith. They all have something in common with us: they are images of God, they are children of God.¹³⁶

While there are those who trace this invitation of the Pope to his Jesuit roots,¹³⁷ Francis himself recalls that to reach out to the margins is a commandment that comes from the Lord Jesus himself: “The Gospel commands us to go out to the peripheries of society, and to find Christ in the suffering and those in need. The Lord tells us, in no uncertain terms, that is what he will judge us on!”¹³⁸ As such, what he is issuing here is not actually his own proposal or a new proposal but a proposal that takes us back to the very Gospel, which has mercy as its “beating heart”¹³⁹ and “where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy.”¹⁴⁰ McVerry agrees, saying: “Of course, poverty and injustice have always been concerns for the Church, as evidenced by many social encyclicals. What Pope Francis has done is to put the poor, the problems of inequality and structural injustice at the heart of the Church’s mission, and therefore at the heart of Christian spirituality and living.”¹⁴¹

Pope Francis also takes the call to communion yet another step further by not only affirming that the human person created in the image of God who is Communion and is thus created for communion; he also avers that the whole of creation itself carries the imprint of the Trinity in its interrelatedness and interdependence and is thus created for communion as well. Hence, inasmuch as other creatures have also been the victims of our exploitation and exclusion, they must now become the object of our solidarity and communion as well. As such, Francis teaches that

¹³⁶ Francis, *Address to Ecclesial Movements on the Vigil of Pentecost*, 18 May 2013, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130518_veglia-pentecoste.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹³⁷ See for instance Thomas Rourke, *The Roots of Pope Francis’ Social and Political Thought: From Argentina to the Vatican* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 92.

¹³⁸ Francis, *Visit to the House of Charity of Nalukolongo, Kenya*, 28 November 2015, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151128_uganda-casa-carita.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹³⁹ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 20.

¹⁴⁰ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 15.

¹⁴¹ Peter McVerry, “Pope Francis and the Poor,” in *The Francis Factor: A New Departure*, ed. John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2014), 92.

human persons not only find their ultimate fulfillment by being in communion with God and with their fellow human beings, but also in communion with all creatures in the entire universe or what he calls “universal communion”¹⁴² that reflects the communion of the Trinity:

The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfillment. The human person grows more, matures more, and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.¹⁴³

In his latest major document, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, there is a beautiful paragraph that captures the tension between the matrix of the throw away culture and the matrix of the culture of mercy in a scene that alludes to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Here, Francis goes as far as to equate having a culture of mercy not only with holiness but with the meaning of being a Christian:

If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being?¹⁴⁴

Sawà and Awa in Philippine Culture and Experience

“Since the start of his papacy,” Poust remarks, “Pope Francis has focused on the many different facets of this throwaway perspective, challenging Catholics and the larger world to shun the pop-culture quest for more, more, more in favor of solidarity —with creation, with our poorer brothers and sisters, with the weak, the

¹⁴² Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 76, 89, 216, 220.

¹⁴³ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 240. See also 239.

¹⁴⁴ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 98.

elderly and the most vulnerable. And while it all sounds beautiful, true and necessary, it can be hard to live for even the most committed believer.”¹⁴⁵ Given the fact that throwaway mentality is a culture, it comes as no surprise that it is difficult to subvert. On the contrary, it can only be overcome by imbibing mercy, not only as a practice or habit, but a way of life.

In other words, what is at stake in this project that the Pope is trying to advance, which Lamb describes as “a renewed Catholicism of tenderness and mercy,”¹⁴⁶ is no less than a battle between two cultures that should be engaged beyond the superficial level. It is a summon to cultural conversion, which of course also takes place in the context of particular cultures such as Philippine culture. Thus, the inspiration of this paper to try to understand these two opposing cultures that Pope speaks of from the lens of our own Philippine culture through the words *sawà* and *awâ*. In all this, the ultimate aim is the same as what Francis expressed: “that the Gospel, as preached in categories proper to each culture, will create a new synthesis with that particular culture.”¹⁴⁷

In the native language, the root word *sawà* can assume the form of a noun (*sawà*), a verb (*magsawà*, *sawáan*), or an adjective (*sawâ*). The UP Diksyonaryong Filipino defines the noun *sawà* as “a feeling of intense disgust at something, such as food, after it has been exploited or used again and again, or at anything repetitive for that matter.”¹⁴⁸ This definition not only uses repetition (*ayaw na ayaw*) to qualify the high intensity of the feeling of disgust, but even adds the absolute particle “na,” expressing that the maximum level of the emotion has in fact been reached. Moreover, the same definition makes use of the rather graphic word “*pinagpasasaan*” which is rarely used colloquially and usually applied only when pertaining in particular to utilization in exploitative or abusive contexts, or even to rape.

Even more, the verb form of *sawà* emphatically captures the entire dynamics of objectification-consumption-maximization-disposal that marks the throwaway culture. *Magpakasawà* or *pagsawaan* precisely means to exploit something or even someone to the utmost possible satiety. Thereafter, when the maximum satiety has been reached or the object already used up, it is already considered *pinagsawáan* and ready for disposal. Imelda Papin poignantly expresses the drama of this word in a Tagalog song entitled “Hindi Ako Laruan:”

¹⁴⁵ Poust, “Pope Francis’ guide to avoiding a ‘throwaway culture.’”

¹⁴⁶ Christopher Lamb, “Reviving the Spirit of Reform,” *The Tablet*, 10 March 2018, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 129.

¹⁴⁸ “pakiramdam na ayaw na ayaw na sa isang bagay, gaya ng pagkain na pinagpasasaan o laging kinakain at anumang paulit-ulit.” *UP Diksyonaryong Filipino*, s.v. “sa-wà,” Virgilio Almario, ed., (Quezon City: Sentro ng Wikang Filipino, 2009).

*Hindi ako isang laruan
na kung ayaw mo na'y iyong papalitan
matapos angkinin pag-ibig ko't dangal
iniwan mo akong dusa't luhaan.*

I am no toy you can replace
when you do not want me anymore
after claiming my love and my purity,
casting me off in tears and sorrow.

*Pangako mo'y walang natupad
pagka't pag-ibig mo pala sa aki'y huwad
bigong puso ko sa yo'y naghahangad
O kay sakit naman sinapit nyaring palad.*

None of your promises were fulfilled
for your love itself was empty
leaving my heart emptied in its wake
pining for you in great misery.

*Hindi ako laruan na iyong iiwan
matapos angkinin at pagsawaan
Ako'y may damdamin marunong masaktan
Tulad mo rin ako puso'y nasusugatan.*

I am not a toy you can dispose
after ravishing and exploiting me.
I have feelings and know how to hurt
with a heart like yours that bleeds.

In what appears to be a song of emancipation, the subject of the song resists the objectification of being seen not as a person but as an object, specifically a toy (*laruan*), which is obviously an object meant for enjoyment or pleasure. In fact, the song narrates that this “toy” has already been enjoyed to maximum satiety (*matapos angkinin at pagsawaan*) and is therefore about to be replaced and discarded (*papalitan, iiwan*), or has in fact been replaced and discarded in a pitiful condition (*iniwan mo akong dusa't luhaan*) perhaps in favor of a new person to be used as a toy in a like manner. At the same time, the song insightfully points out that the dynamics initially seemed like love, inasmuch as it is characterized by intense desire and passion, for as long as the subject was still enjoyable and pleasurable. In due course, however, it would prove to be an empty love (*pag-ibig mo pala sa aki'y huwad*) since it was not really affection for the person but the compulsive desire to consume that is the driving force of the throwaway culture.

Interestingly, we find a very curious detail in one of the earliest pages of our recorded history in a conversation between Ferdinand Magellan and a peace-making party led by the nephew of Rajah Humabon, as recorded by Antonio Pigafetta who was historian of the expedition. When the topic turned to the question of who will succeed the chieftain, the nephew replied that since Humabon had no sons but only daughters, the same nephew of his who was also the husband of the chieftain's eldest daughter was going to replace him. Then the dialogue takes an unexpected shift, as the natives commented: “when the fathers and mothers grow old, they received no further honor, but their children commanded them.”

At this point, Pigafetta reports: “The captain told them that God made the sky, the sea, and everything else, and that He had commanded us to honor our fathers and mothers, and that whoever did otherwise was condemned to eternal fire.” This

sparked the interest of the natives. Magellan continued to speak to them about the doctrines of the Christian faith, after which the party of natives “joyfully” requested him for more religious instruction and told him that they will ask permission from their king for them to be baptized. Eventually, Rajah Humabon himself would become a Christian along with his family and subjects.¹⁴⁹ Arcilla explains this crucial turning point:

In a society where every member of the tribe was a potential food gatherer or fighter, the old, the weak, the sickly, anyone who could no longer be of service to the community, had no place or importance and lost the place in the tribe that Christian morality would still allow him. Precisely, Christian charity lies in this, namely, that protection and love are extended to those who most need them. This respect for the human person, as mentioned, was the motivation that made Humabon ask for Christian baptism.¹⁵⁰

Here we see the throw-away culture already manifest in early Philippine society, albeit not in the same scale we see today after the first Industrial Revolution. As early as then, the destructive operations of objectification-consumption-maximization-disposal were already at work, causing the exclusion of vulnerable members of the community such as the elderly when they were no longer serviceable or useful.

In 1667, Combés, a Jesuit missionary, reports about the early Filipinos that “[t]hey do not know what charity is. Consequently, whatever benefits they confer are all placed on account as debts, which their tyranny estimates wholly to their own satisfaction.”¹⁵¹ He then narrates that when for example an orphan is adopted, help is not given gratuitously but the orphan becomes the slave of the person who gave help. As such, what is rendered is not really an act of kindness but a loan, an *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) that needs to be repaid not only by some acts of gratitude but by lifelong servitude. About a century earlier, Legazpi reported the same observation, remarking that in the newly-discovered islands, “No one favors another, unless it is for his own interest; on the other hand, if a man in some time of need shelters a relative or a brother in his house, supports him, and provides him with food for a few days, he will consider that relative as his slave from that time on, and is served by him.”¹⁵² This impression is shared by the Augustinian, Gaspar de San Agustin, who wrote in 1720 that Filipinos tend to “act tyrannically one toward another... that, if the

¹⁴⁹ Antonio Pigafetta, “The First Voyage Around the World” in *The Philippine Islands: 1493-1803*, ed. Emma Blair and James Alexander Robertson (BR), Vol. 33 (Cleveland, OH: The A. H. Clark Company, 1906) 143-156.

¹⁵⁰ Jose Arcilla, *The Fine Print of Philippine History* (Makati: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 35.

¹⁵¹ Francisco Combés, *The Natives of the Southern Islands* (Madrid, 1667) BR 40: 147.

¹⁵² Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, “Relation of the Filipinas Islands and of the character and condition of their inhabitants” (ca. 1565) BR 2: 55.

Spaniards had not come to these islands, the Indians would have been destroyed; for, like fish, the greater would have swallowed the lesser, in accordance with the tyranny which they exercised in their paganism.”¹⁵³

While rather negative and perhaps written with some Western bias, these early accounts are not entirely surprising. Here we confirm that “throw-away culture” has been part of man’s fallen nature since it became corrupted as an effect of original sin, generating inconsistencies and duplicities in human culture, causing people to think and behave selfishly, and leading them to objectify their fellow human beings as well as other creatures in the process.

This incongruity in fallen human nature continues to be seen in many aspects of Philippine culture until today, as for instance in social relationships or *pakikipagkapwa*, or even in the notion of *kapwa* itself. On the one hand, Enriquez calls attention to the sense of solidarity built into the word *kapwa*. He points out that although *kapwa* can express what is meant in English both by “others” and by “fellow beings,” there is an essential difference: “In Filipino, *kapwa* is the unity of the ‘self’ and ‘other.’ The English ‘others’ is actually used in opposition to the ‘self’ and implies the recognition of the self as a separate entity. In contrast, *kapwa* is a recognition of shared identity.”¹⁵⁴

At the same time, however, *kapwa* can be overly limited and even narcissistic. Untalan, Mordeno, and Decatoria for instance observe that although there is in fact such a notion of others as akin to oneself (*kapwa*) in the Filipino consciousness, this concern can sometimes be confined to one’s primary groups, beginning with one’s family. Moreover, what appears to be a concern for others may actually be self-referential in the sense of being ultimately a concern for one’s own welfare, given the extended notion of oneself as “we-self.”¹⁵⁵

In line with this, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines observes that Filipino family ties are very strong to the point that they are able to do anything for their family, regardless of whether this is right or wrong. They also note that these strong family ties sometimes turn into a sense of blind allegiance, leading to ironies and injustices in the economic, political, and cultural spheres. Thus, the

¹⁵³ Gaspar de San Agustin, *Letter on the Filipinos* (Manila, 8 June 1720) BR 40: 225.

¹⁵⁴ Virgilio Enriquez, “Concept of Justice in the Philippine Value System,” Part 2/4, *Punctuations*, October 1987, 19.

¹⁵⁵ See John Hermes Untalan, Imelu Mordeno, and Johnny Decatoria, “Exploring the Dark Triad of Personality in Filipino Culture: Preliminary Findings,” *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 41/2 (1998): 33-54. Their study connects the relationality of the Filipino with his extended notion of selfhood as “we-self,” which thereby shapes the expression of what is actually a subtle narcissism that takes the form of pursuing the welfare of one’s primary groups with a motive that is at the same time self-serving.

Philippine bishops point out the need to transcend this narrow sense of family and transform it into a more inclusive sense of belonging to the wider family of God, which includes the poor and the sinners.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, the *New National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* remarks that “Filipinos are indeed social-minded, but their social-mindedness is very often limited to the family or small group. This is one reason why corruption is so rampant, since the public good is equated with the good of one’s family.”¹⁵⁷

With such a limited concept of *kapwa*, the Filipino attitude of *pagkakanya-kanya* becomes a source of apathy and fragmentation as well as an obstacle to national unity. In the purview of such a society, *awâ* is optional, a feeling that need not be acted upon. At times, it even needs to be begged as an unwilling favor as seen in the expression “parang awâ mo na.” Thus, David notes that the concept of *awâ* in the Filipino language can actually end with just mere emotion.¹⁵⁸ One can simply say “kawawa naman” and move on, especially if acting upon it causes inconvenience to oneself or gets in the way of the interest of one’s family. Similarly, Tomen observes that *awâ* can end with a mere desire to be of help: “Juan/a, the Filipino every man/woman equates mercy with pity - to be moved by the plight of another being, enough to want to help him/her improve his/her situation. Here lies the problem: *awâ* does not require action; it can be an end unto itself. [...] *Awâ* can be a fleeting feeling; once expressed verbally it is gone.”¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the possibility of redemption and transcendence always appears in the horizon. As in that happy encounter between Humabon’s nephew and Magellan, the widening of previously narrow notions and perspectives can take place. This is where a “culture of mercy” comes in, or more accurately, this is where it needs to be surfaced and strengthened for it is already to be found, too, in the native culture. If the throw-away culture was already manifest in local society before the Spaniards arrived, so also is the culture of mercy.

For instance, Legazpi noted that although gold was readily found in the islands, the natives only extracted as much gold as they needed. This was incomprehensible for the Western colonizer who came precisely in an aggressive search for more gold and other valuable resources. He narrates: “When a chief possesses one or two earrings of very fine gold, two bracelets and a chain, he will not trouble himself to

¹⁵⁶ Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Pastoral Letter on Filipino Spirituality *Landas ng Pagpapakabanal*, July 1999 (Makati, Word and Life Publications, 1999), nos. 73-74.

¹⁵⁷ Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, *New National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines 2007* (Manila: Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 2007), no. 70.

¹⁵⁸ Pablo Virgilio David and Nina Tomen, *The Gospel of Mercy According to Juan/a* (Makati: Saint Pauls Philippines, 2016), x.

¹⁵⁹ David and Tomen, *The Gospel of Mercy According to Juan/a*, 22.

look for any more gold. Any native who possesses a basketful of rice will not seek for more, or do any further work, until it is finished.” Thus he complained that “they do not even try to become wealthy, nor do they care to accumulate riches.” He even comments further: “Thus does their idleness surpass their covetousness.”¹⁶⁰

What appears to the foreigner as sloth may have been the deep sense of respect that the early Filipinos had towards their natural environment, from which they took only what is necessary. Even today, Filipinos have indigenous practices like *pananghid* or asking permission before taking anything from their environment. In this manner, the environment is preserved from abuse and treated with reverence, as opposed to the unbridled avarice of the throw-away culture. Even until today, such practices continue to be observed in some of our indigenous tribes such as the Ati of Panay Island, to the consternation of Western-minded observers.

The same kind of culture is reflected in many of our local idioms and proverbs. For instance, a greedy person who exploits others is contemptuously described as “*parang lintá*,” likened to a leech or bloodsucker that tries to extract whatever it can.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, deep appreciation is shown for natural resources as gifts from God, which is seen in the Kapampangan saying “*Ing bayabas a bubut, gracia nia naman ning dios*” (The guava fruit may be small and stunted, but it is a gift from God nevertheless).¹⁶² Goodness is recognized even in what is seemingly ugly or useless as conveyed by the Tagalog proverb: “*Walang kapangitang di may kabutihan*” (There is no ugliness that does not have some goodness in it).¹⁶³ Here the vision directed towards the other is not objectifying but contemplative, and the urge is not to exploit but to value.

Even the system of *utang na loob* that was criticized by Combés, Legazpi and de San Agustin can have a positive inverse marked not by abuse but by interdependence. Such is the viewpoint of Colin, a fellow Jesuit and contemporary of Combés, who saw symbiosis instead of usury in the *utang na loob* practice of Filipinos:

There was another kind of service which was not of a truth servitude, although it appeared to be such. It was generally seen among certain persons called *cabalangay*. Whenever such persons wanted any small trifle, they begged the head chief of their barangay for it, and he gave it to them. In return, whenever he summoned them, they were obliged to go to him to work in his fields or to row in his boats. Whenever a feast or banquet was given, they all came together and helped furnish the tuba, wine, or quilan, such being their method of service.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ de Legazpi, “Relation of the Filipinas Islands,” 56-57.

¹⁶¹ Thelma Kintanar, *The University of the Philippines Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press/Anvil Publishing, 1996), 174.

¹⁶² Kintanar, *UP Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos*, 105.

¹⁶³ Kintanar, *UP Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos*, 114.

¹⁶⁴ Francisco Colin, *Native Races and Their Customs* (Madrid, 1663) BR 40: 96.

For him, the system of *utang na loob* consisted of a network of gratitude rather than control. Within the *barangay*, a mutualistic relationship existed between the chief (*pinuno*) and his subjects (*nasasakupan*) who are not considered aliens but part of his extended family inasmuch as they constitute his in-group (*sakop*). In fact, the word *pinuno* carries a related socio-linguistic nuance with its image of a tree that shelters and nourishes those that come under it. Hence, the *sakop* relationship is not necessarily a form of usury forcibly exacted by the benefactor for benefits bestowed but it can also be a free act of gratitude elicited from beneficiaries for favors received. As Andres and Ilada-Andres explain:

The *sakop* prevails over the individual. It demands from the individual a continuing act of reciprocal action with the fellow members. The Filipino as an individual finds fulfillment in *sakop*-fulfillment.¹⁶⁵

This positive evaluation of the Filipino practice of mutual assistance espoused by Colin is shared by the Franciscan, Juan Francisco de San Antonio, who noted that: “There they lived governed by their own chiefs; not with a hard and fast rule, but *all in friendly relations*. By virtue of this friendship they were obliged to aid their chief, both in his wars and in the cultivation of his fields; and *all to aid one another mutually*.”¹⁶⁶ Here we see that this interdependence was not limited to the relationship between superiors and subordinates, or between the materially secure and the materially impoverished, but extended to all members of the community who had a sense of responsibility for one another and provided reciprocal assistance in times of need.

It is in this sense that compassion is shown and care is expressed, particularly in *pagdadamay*, the Filipino name of compassion-care, which Abueva identifies as a distinctive Filipino trait.¹⁶⁷ This value is very much seen, as for instance in the practice of giving *abuloy* (alms) in times of bereavement. Even now, Filipino neighborhoods especially in rural areas continue the practice of contributing materially and financially for a deceased person’s wake and burial. This concrete material assistance becomes the embodiment of the inner sentiment that is usually called *pakikiramay* - a word, which is also derived from *pagdamay*. As people go to the wake or burial of the deceased, they say to the bereaved, “*Nakikiramay po kami*” and they show this *pakikiramay* concretely by offering alms. Licuanan connects *pakikiramay* with *pakikipagkapwa-tao* and identifies it with the other Filipino traits of availability, magnanimity and neighborliness: “*Pakikipagkapwa-tao* is manifested in

¹⁶⁵ Tomas Andres and Pilar Corazon Ilada-Andres, *Understanding the Filipino* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2008), 59.

¹⁶⁶ Juan Francisco de San Antonio, *The Native Peoples and Their Customs* (Manila, 1738-44) BR 40: 348. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁷ Jose Abueva, *The Making of the Filipino Nation and Republic* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1998), 631.

a basic sense of justice and fairness, and in concern for others. It is demonstrated in the Filipino's ability to empathize with others, in helpfulness and generosity in times of need (*pakikiramay*), in the practice of *bayanihan* or mutual assistance, and in the famous Filipino hospitality."¹⁶⁸

Meanwhile, an expression very close to the literal meaning of the Greek word for compassion, *σπλαγχνίζομαι*, is the phrase “*bumaligtad ang sikmura*” that means “literally, one's stomach turned inside out.” “A colorful expression denoting disgust or revulsion,”¹⁶⁹ it can apply to one's visceral reaction at the miserable condition of others, which is seen as revolting and unacceptable. Similarly, we use the idiomatic expression “*hindi masikmura*” that literally means “cannot be stomached” or the similar idiom “*nabagbag ang kalooban*.” While these expressions can refer in a general sense to “anyone or anything disgusting or obnoxious,”¹⁷⁰ they can also describe the strong and unrelenting moral impulse to do something about an intolerable situation such as social inequality or injustice. On the negative side, apathy or lack of a sense of compassion about the patent plight of others is sharply excoriated as in the Bikolano expression: “*Muklat ang mata pero buta*” that means “her/his eyes are open, but s/he cannot see” or in other words, “one knows but refuses to get involved.”¹⁷¹

In this way, *pagdamay* is upheld not only as an important social value but as an indispensable social responsibility calling for concrete, effective, transformative action. Thus, while David and Tomen rightly notes that *awa* can end with just mere emotion,¹⁷² there is at the same time a perception in the Filipino mind of the intrinsic link in mercy between feeling and action. This is expressed in the saying that we usually address to those who keep on praying but fail to act: “*Nasa Diyos ang awa, nasa tao ang gawa*” [Mercy comes from God; labor from man].¹⁷³ As Tomen puts it, “The *awâ* that lingers and moves one to action is mercy. It involves progression from feeling to action on the part of the giver; from nothingness to fullness on the part of the recipient.”¹⁷⁴

Nonetheless, the Filipino notion of *pagdadamay* goes beyond a fleeting emotion or the giving of external assistance. It also represents the inner sense of

¹⁶⁸ Patricia Licuanan, “A Moral Recovery Program: Building a People - Building a Nation” in Manuel B. Dy, ed., *Values in Philippine Culture and Education* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 36.

¹⁶⁹ Kintanar, *UP Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos*, 160.

¹⁷⁰ Kintanar, *UP Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos*, 163.

¹⁷¹ Kintanar, *UP Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos*, 110.

¹⁷² Pablo Virgilio David and Nina Tomen, *The Gospel of Mercy According to Juan/a* (Makati: Saint Pauls Philippines, 2016), x.

¹⁷³ Kintanar, *UP Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos*, 110. See also CBCP, *Landas ng Pagpapakabanal*, no. 25.

¹⁷⁴ David and Tomen, *The Gospel of Mercy*, 22.

involvement that it wells from. As dela Torre explains, *pagdadamay* is more than just *pakikisama* since it entails “a certain level of commitment” to commiserate with and to be of help to the other in times of need, be it emotional or financial.¹⁷⁵ In this sense, one helps the other person not as an outsider but as one who commiserates or “suffers with” them. Alejo concurs by stating that *pagdamay* necessitates going out of oneself in order to enter into the experience of others.¹⁷⁶ This demands a sense of empathy and inter-belonging that makes the suffering of the other one’s own. As such, *pagdadamay* ultimately gives birth to communion or *pakikiisa*.

This sense of *pakikiisa* is firmly rooted in the sense of belonging and connection, which is very strong in the Filipino consciousness. As one of our proverbs expresses it, “Ang sakit ng kalingkingan, damdam ng buong katawan.”¹⁷⁷ (The pain of the pinky is felt by the entire body). With this “corporate” sense of being interconnected and interrelated members of one and the same body, one cannot turn a blind eye - as we saw in the Bikolano reproof - to the suffering of others, which is always at the same time one’s own suffering. This even goes as far as to imply a sense of communal ownership and the sharing even of private goods. For instance, Andres and Ilada-Andres note that “[i]n a community where there are Filipinos and there exists a *sakop* feeling, private property is the community’s property.” When some community members refuse to share what they have, this constitutes not only a failure in generosity but a transgression of the norms of neighborliness. For instance, a family that owns the lone television set in the vicinity is expected to share it with their neighbors, otherwise they would have violated “the moral imperative of the *sakop*.”¹⁷⁸

Thus, *pagdadamay* is the sharing not only of material goods or mutual service but the sharing of life, the sharing of material goods being only the external expression of this inner sharing of life. It refers not only to compassion or its manifestation in the form of care but also denotes the fulfillment of such charity in solidarity or communion. Moreover, this communion does not only mean material interdependence as in the transactional sense of *quid pro quo* but a true sense of interconnectedness and belonging. As Alejo says: “may kapwa sa loob ng tao” (there is a neighbor within every man),¹⁷⁹ who forms an integral and essential part of one’s humanity that can never be extricated. Such a worldview, as we have seen, is deeply

¹⁷⁵ Visitation De La Torre, *Cultural Icons of the Philippines* (Makati City: Tower Book House, 2002), 120.

¹⁷⁶ Albert Alejo, *Tao Po! Tuloy!: Isang Landas ng Pag-Unawa sa Loob ng Tao* (Quezon City: ADMU, Office for Research and Publications, 1990), 93.

¹⁷⁷ Alejo, *Tao Po! Tuloy!*, 91.

¹⁷⁸ Andres and Ilada-Andres, *Understanding the Filipino*, 59.

¹⁷⁹ Alejo, *Tao Po! Tuloy!*, 91.

embedded in our socio-linguistics where the other is never an absolute other, an *iba*, but always a fellow, a *kapwa* or *ka-puwang* with whom I partake of the same space, the same world, the same existence. As such, *pagdadamayán* leading to *pakikiisa* truly has great potential to be a viable model of the communion lifestyle marked by sharing and solidarity that is proposed by Francis.

According to Enriquez, this *pakikiisa* or “being able to identify with another’s being... being able to share complete trust,”¹⁸⁰ is the highest possible level of Filipino social relationship.¹⁸¹ It is the culmination of *pakikipagkapwa*, which he describes as the most important value for Filipinos.¹⁸² On the other hand, this *pakikipagkapwa* begins with *pakikiramdam* (sensing), which he calls “the pivotal value” in the Philippine value system. As we can see, this framework of the dynamics of *pakikipagkapwa* is very much in keeping with what we have said about the matrix of the culture of mercy that begins with contemplation as a decisive moment of conversion and culminates in communion. Such dynamics is seen even more clearly in this paragraph of his:

It can be said that being one with another is a full realization of *pakikipagkapwa*. At this level of interaction there is total trust and identification among the parties involved. The “shared individuality” in *kapwa*-psychology has a reflexive quality, such that what is good for one is shared and is good for the other, what would be for the detriment of one is accepted in fact as detrimental to the other. Being one with another, a person will not act or decide in anyway that would injure upon the benefit and dignity as a human being of another person precisely because he has complete appreciation of the other person’s being, as if it were an extension of one’s own self.¹⁸³

Furthermore, Enriquez goes on to elaborate that “The dialectics of *kapwa* both as a psychology and as a worldview include not only *pakikisama*, as seen in the unity of man and nature, but also *pakikibaka* (level of fusion in a common struggle) in the face of injustice and exploitation.” He states that “*Pakikibaka*, as an aspect of a *kapwa*-oriented world-view awakens the Filipino’s consciousness of present-day realities and motivates them to be as one....”¹⁸⁴ In other words, *pakikipagkapwa* engenders a sense of solidarity where contemplation, compassion, care, and communion are one in a dynamic process of conversion that begins with awareness and consciousness by way of contemplation and culminates in identification with the other as truly an inextricable part of oneself.

¹⁸⁰ Enriquez, “Concept of Justice in the Philippine Value System,” 17.

¹⁸¹ Virgilio Enriquez, “Concept of Justice in the Philippine Value System,” *Part 3/4, Punctuations*, November-December 1987, 7.

¹⁸² Enriquez, “Concept of Justice in the Philippine Value System,” 2/4, 20.

¹⁸³ Enriquez, “Concept of Justice in the Philippine Value System,” 3/4, 7.

¹⁸⁴ Enriquez, “Concept of Justice in the Philippine Value System,” 2/4, 21.

Nevertheless, imbibing *pakikipagkapwa* on the level of culture as the Filipino face of the culture of mercy remains a challenge. As David observes, “Just as mercy abounds in this land, there too is lack of it in many ways. To see the plight and suffering of others and do nothing about it, to prolong it or condone it - this is poverty of mercy.”¹⁸⁵ It is in this sense that Bulatao describes the *pakikipagkapwatao* of Filipinos who managed to transcend their small group mentality as “the rare virtue” of those who, coming from a limited and self-serving allegiance to one’s primary social group, have now become “willing to treat others as though they belonged to their family.”¹⁸⁶

In the same light, Dy calls for a sense of solidarity, calling it imperative for the Philippines today: “For a nation of 7,100 or more islands, divided into so many regions, each at home in its own language, and with factions of different if not conflicting ideologies, the value of solidarity may be our primary road to survival as a nation.”¹⁸⁷ Developing a local culture of mercy through *pakikipagkapwa* is what would allow us to transcend our *pagkakanya-kanya* towards *pagkakaisa*. This sense of belonging to a wider community would effectively take Filipino culture beyond narrowly conceived notions of family that sometimes constitute a moral liability for the Filipino. As Francis avows, authentic development will only be possible “if we can prove capable of leaving behind a throwaway culture and embracing one of encounter and acceptance.”¹⁸⁸

From July 13-17, 2016, the Archdiocese of Manila Office for New Evangelization held the Third Philippine Conference on the New Evangelization (PCNE 3) at the University of Santo Tomas. The theme of PCNE 3 focused on the Filipino words for mercy, understanding, and action: “*Awa, unawa, gawa*.” In the conference concept paper, they reflected on the current Philippine situation, saying: “Looking at ourselves from the lens of mercy, we cannot help but feel conflicted. We are grateful for the abundance of mercy (“*umaapaw na awa*”) in our midst. But we are also enraged by the unconscionable dearth of mercy (“*di na naawa*”).”¹⁸⁹ In this light, the conference offered yet another way of understanding the matrix of the culture of mercy from the lens of Philippine culture through the interaction of the words *awa*, *unawa*, and *gawa*.

¹⁸⁵ David and Tomen, *The Gospel of Mercy According to Juan/a*, 27.

¹⁸⁶ Jaime Bulatao, “Another Look at Philippine Values,” *Punctuations*, March 1987, 17.

¹⁸⁷ Manuel Dy, Jr., “Outline of a Project of Filipino Ethics” in Manuel Dy, ed., *Values in Philippine Culture and Education* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 21.

¹⁸⁸ Francis, *Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014*, 5 August 2013, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹⁸⁹ Third Philippine Conference on the New Evangelization (PCNE 3), PCNE3 Concept Paper “Awa, Unawa, Gawa: The Filipino Experience of Mercy” <https://bravofilipino.com/2016-pcne-releases-concept-paper-awa-unawa-gawa-filipino-experience-mercy/> (accessed 1 May 2018).

Unawa (understanding) is more than rational understanding. It is closer to empathy and internalizing the situation of the other. If *awa* allows us to experience mercy in the gut, *unawa* enables us to enter the world of our *kapwa* (neighbor). *Unawa* is not just knowing what mercy is. It is knowing the person behind the walls of isolation and exclusion. *Gawa* (action) is fascinatingly rooted in *awa* and expressed more specifically in *kawang-gawa* (charitable action).

Understood in this way, the response of *awa* that begins in its contemplative gaze emerges as a unified reality: *unawa*, the sense of compassion, goes beyond mere feelings to become a realization that calls for action, thus issuing into care, *gawa*. From the gaze of contemplation, a feeling resurges in the deepest part of one's being, a feeling which is at the same time an understanding, an understanding which cannot but be translated into action. Not only is the *gawa* of charity deeply rooted in *awa*, it also appears to be inextricably tied to a sense of belonging to the *kawan* or flock. Thus, it is very aptly referred to as *kawang-gawa*, being not only an act of charity but an act of communion. The concept paper adds:

Gawa gives flesh to *awa*. It gives credibility to our musings on mercy. Without *gawa*, our claims for mercy would be reduced to *gawa-gawa lamang* (mere rhetorics). *Awa-unawa-gawa* gives us a three-dimensional experience and understanding of mercy.¹⁹⁰

Timoner, a Filipino Dominican, reflects: "For us Filipinos, mercy is not just a matter of the heart but a matter of the mind as well. It is interesting that for us, to 'know' or 'understand' is to be 'compassionate.'"¹⁹¹ Indeed, only the gaze of compassion allows us to understand the world for what it truly is, which is the opposite of the relativizing and objectifying view of the world that in turn gives rise to utilitarian and consumerist outlooks and behavior. In his own words: "The Filipino word 'unawa' (una ang awa) encapsulates this best. 'Una-awa. Upang maunawaan natin nang lubusan ang isang tao, kailangang mauna ang awa.' A merciful attitude disposes us to understand persons and our world better."¹⁹² On the contrary, when what precedes our understanding is the desire to consume, we could only regard and treat other creatures and other persons as objects for our pleasure and satisfaction.

He goes on to expound that "Mercy is no mere sentimentality. It involves not just the heart but the mind as well. Similarly, understanding is not purely cognitive. It engages not only the mind but the heart as well. *Unawa* makes the heart and mind

¹⁹⁰ PCNE 3, PCNE 3 Concept Paper.

¹⁹¹ Gerard Francisco Timoner III as quoted by Inquirer Lifestyle Staff, "'Unawa': For Filipinos, mercy is a matter of heart and mind," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 3 January 2016, <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/218391/unawa-for-filipinos-mercy-is-a-matter-of-heart-and-mind/> (accessed 1 May 2018).

¹⁹² Ibid.

one.” As we have seen, compassion and care are inseparable aspects of the response of *awa*, which find their unity embodied and fulfilled in action. In the process, not only do they make the heart and mind one. They also engender communion or oneness. Once more, we see in this other model the same matrix of the culture of mercy as in the writings of Pope Francis: contemplation-compassion-care-communion.

Indeed, the ambivalent reality is that while the culture of mercy is something that Filipinos need to develop, especially at present, it is also one of the core values enshrined at the very heart of our culture. The CBCP writes in 1999:

The mercy of God frequently comes up in ordinary conversations among Filipinos. To someone at the brink of despair, people say “May *awa* ng Diyos” [God has mercy]. When asked how one is doing, people respond, “Mabuti naman, *awa* ng Diyos” [Doing well, by the mercy of God]. To someone asking for blessing, we respond “Kaawaan ka ng Diyos” [God have mercy on you.]. In the Filipino consciousness, mercy is practically equivalent to grace, to blessing.¹⁹³

The bishops of the Philippines go on to reflect that “For us, mercy always has to do with the Holy. There is no holiness in someone who is ruthless and does not know how to forgive. There is no holiness in a person who is devoid of compassion and is not in the least way moved at the sight of a fellow human being’s suffering.”¹⁹⁴ The biting expression “*walang awa*” (without mercy) is the same as “*walang puso*” (without heart), which is one of the worst things that can ever be said about a person in Filipino culture. Being “*walang awa*” is considered as “*hindi makatao*” or a denial of one’s humanity. This view is very much in line with the thinking of Pope Francis in *Gaudete et Exsultate* that we have mentioned earlier where he equates mercy with holiness and Christianity. If for the Pope, to be holy and to be Christian is to be merciful, for the Filipino, to be human is to be merciful.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have outlined the matrix of the throw-away culture or the culture of exclusion as objectification-consumption-maximization-disposal. It begins with a relativistic worldview concerned only with the utilization of objects

¹⁹³ “Madalas mabanggit sa karaniwang usapan ng Pilipino ang *awa* ng Diyos. Sa natutuksong mawalan ng pag-asa, may nagsasabi: ‘May *awa* ang Diyos.’ Sa kinukumusta, ‘Mabuti naman, *awa* ng Diyos.’ Sa nagmamano: ‘Kaawaan ka ng Diyos.’ Sa kamalayang Pilipino, halos pareho ang *awa* sa grasya, sa biyaya.” CBCP, *Landas ng Pagpapakabanal*, nos. 10-11.

¹⁹⁴ “Palagi, para sa atin, may kinalaman ang *awa* sa Banal. Walang kabanalan sa taong malupit at hindi marunong magpatawad. Walang kabanalan sa taong walang malasakit at hindi man lamang maantig ang damdamin kapag nasaksihan ang pagdurusa sa kapwa.” CBCP, *Landas ng Pagpapakabanal*, no. 24.

and persons for personal pleasure and satisfaction and unmindful of their intrinsic worth. As such, it is acted out in maximization and upon reaching the highest point of satiety terminates with the disposal of the used object or person which is no longer capable of bringing any further gratification.

At the same time, we also defined the matrix of the counter-culture of mercy, proposed by Francis as an antidote to this throw-away culture. The four elements of this culture consist of contemplation-compassion-care-communion. Beginning with a contemplative gaze that allows the realization of the real worth of persons and objects, mercy takes on the form of compassion especially in the present context of suffering and exploitation on the part of many human persons and of the natural environment. This is concretized in care or charity and eventually becomes a culture of communion. This communion, especially directed towards those who are thrown-away by society, then becomes the undoing of the throw-away culture.

Having done so, we turned to the lens of Philippine culture and experience in order to deepen our understanding of these two cultures. Not only did we find the same matrix of the throw-away culture in the dynamics of the word *sawà*, we also saw that even prior to the coming of the Spaniards, utilitarian and consumerist tendencies were already present in Philippine culture.

Nevertheless, it was not only the throw-away culture that was manifest in our own culture as early as then, but also the culture of mercy, which is capable of widening and expanding our otherwise narrow vision, concern, involvement and commitment. With such a culture of mercy that goes by the Filipino name of *pagdadamayán*, the *pakikiisa* which is its fruit becomes the reversal of the exploitative and wasteful culture of *sawà* by way of the dynamic integration of *awa*, *unawa* and *gawa*.^{PS}

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