



Inculturating The Vows In Filipino Culture

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Religious life is lived out always within a given culture of a people. Ideally, it should be inculturated wherever it is found. The inculturation of religious life in the Philippines is yet still a wish than a reality.

Inculturation can be defined as a process by which a religious community lives its life---community, vows, prayer and ministry---in such a way that it brings forth new expressions from within a given culture and in turn becomes a transforming factor in that culture.¹ This process involves two complementary dimensions. First, there is a dialogical encounter between religious life and culture. Second, there is mutual learning and transformation between the two.

The task of inculturating religious life in the Philippines is a daunting challenge. But, one can and just has to start doing it somewhere. In this reflection, we shall focus on the inculturation of the vows. This reflection will be divided into four parts. First, we will look into the finality of the vows. Second, we will consider a way of inculturating the vows in the Filipino culture. Third, we will have a sampling of re-interpretations of the three vows in our culture. Finally, we will wind up with a few concluding remarks.

PART I – THE VOWS ARE MEANS TO LOVE

The following of Jesus chaste, poor, and obedient life is the central value of religious life. As *Vita Consecrata* puts it: “By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, ‘that form of life which He, as Son

¹ Cf. This definition is an adaptation from the “Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture,” Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, January 25, 1999, 51.

of God, accepted in entering this world.”² Thus, the commitment to the vows and counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience is the core theological reality of religious life.

However, the religious do not profess the counsels as if these are ends in themselves. The vows and counsels are not terminal values, but rather instrumental values. For what greater reality do religious profess the vows? On this question, St. Thomas Aquinas gives us a classic insight, to wit: love or charity is the finality of the vows.³ That is to say, the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience are ordained to the counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience; and the latter are further ordained to love. As *Lumen Gentium*, echoing this insight, explains: by the practice of the counsels, “the perfect love of God and neighbor is fostered in a unique way.”⁴ The counsels are “means and instruments of love.”⁵

John Paul II affirms this same insight. In a general audience on October 26, 1994, he says, “the purpose of the vows is to scale the heights of love: a complete love dedicated to Christ under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and, through Christ, offered to the Father.”⁶ In *Vita Consecrata*, the Holy Father did the same in two places:

First, he writes of it from a *Christological* perspective. “By embracing chastity, they (consecrated persons) make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ’s poverty, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn 17:7, 10). By accepting through the sacrifice of their own freedom, the mystery of Christ’s filial obedience, they profess that he is infinitely loving, as the One who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything.”⁷

Second, he treats it from a *Trinitarian* perspective. “The chastity of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an *undivided heart* (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) is a reflection of the *infinite love* which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity.” “When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, ‘though he was rich ... became poor’ (2Cor 8:9), it becomes an expression of the *total gift of self* which the three Divine Persons make to one another.” “Obedience, practiced in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the

² No. 16.

³ Summa Theologiae, II-II, 184, 3.

⁴ No. 45

⁵ No.44

⁶ L’ Osservatore Romano, 2 November 1994.

⁷ No.16.

Father's will (cf. Jn 4:34) ... is a reflection in history of the loving *harmony* between the three Divine Persons."⁸

The three key phrases on what the three vows reflect-- namely, *the infinite love, the total gift of self* and *the loving harmony*, between and among the divine Persons—are clear words of the claim that the vows and counsels are meant to signify and express the Trinitarian love, which, far from remaining within the Trinity, reaches out to all humans and the whole creation. The practice of each vow originates from this Trinitarian love and is a person's response of love to the Trinity.

In sum, it stands out clearly that the vows are a response to love in love. *The counsels are instrumental values of love*. By professing the vows, religious men and women are *vowed to love*. For the religious, *the vow of vows is to love*, to witness to God's love.

PART II – COMING HOME TO THE FILIPINO VALUES OF LOVE

Culture as Values

Culture is a rich and multi-faceted dynamic reality. But the main constitutive coordinate of culture is the human person, or better the human community, considered in all its aspects: physical, psychological, spiritual, social, economic, political and religious. It is the human community that shapes or brings about a given culture, though culture also shapes the milieu in which humans and a human community may thrive and develop. Hence, the inner core of a culture consists in all that which the community considers to be good, true, beautiful and desirable in the interactions and interrelationships of humans among themselves and beyond them with the world of nature, and with the Absolute itself; it consists in that which the humans consider to bring about the well-being, security and happiness of the humans. In other words, the inner core of culture lies in its values.

As the CBCP's *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture* puts it, the inner dimension of culture is summed under the rubric of values: "what a people define as good, what their goals in life are, what makes them act thus and so and not another way. Values, thus, are at the deepest level of culture—they are its heart and core. They are, for all intents and purposes, what give people their identity as a people, a distinct human society."⁹

It can be said then that a culture is what its values are. This is the focus of our consideration here of the Filipino culture. Whenever we refer to the Filipino culture,

⁸ No. 21.

⁹ No. 7.

we mean the typical Filipino values. When we speak of the inculturation of religious vows in Philippine culture, we mean its inculturation in Filipino values.

Encountering the Filipino Values

The inculturation of the vows within the Filipino culture means the creative dialogical encounter between the vows and the Filipino values. The primary task then is bringing about a meeting, an encounter between the vows and the Filipino values. But, in the first place, where can we find such values alive?

This question raises the crucial issue of a meeting point of dialogical encounter, a meeting point of “conversation” between the vows and Filipino values. Ideally, this meeting point is where the Filipino culture thrives, where its values are alive in a dynamic way. Where or what then could this be?

Speaking of Filipino values, all studies point to the family as the most central value of Filipino culture.¹⁰ Beyond the family being a primary value, the family is the “cradle” of Filipino values. Mina Ramirez explains, “Culture is transmitted by social institutions (socialization), but the most elementary form of transmission is through the family. The family has always been considered as the cradle of society’s values.”¹¹

The significance of the family in the process of socialization, in transmitting a culture or value system, becomes more important when we consider the fact that the first ten years of a person’s life are the most formative, and those years are spent ordinarily in a family. As Jose De Mesa writes: “We interiorize culture without really being aware of it in the day-to-day business of living and growing. In general, the closer and the earlier the contact, especially if it is continuous, the greater is the impact. As a consequence, we reflect to a large extent the values which we have learned from those with whom we are in contact most, namely, our family (see Luzbetak 1998: 199). Seen in this way, the family is not only ‘the foundation of society’ but also ‘a kind of school of deeper humanity’ (GS 52) where the social virtues which every society needs are learned (GS 53).”¹²

In sum, it is within the Filipino family or home that Filipino values are first experienced, learned and transmitted. This does not mean that the Filipino value system does not exist and operate beyond the confines of the Filipino family. It means rather that an average Filipino family is where the Filipino values thrive. It is in a Filipino home where the religious vows can meet the Filipino values.

¹⁰ See also Serafin Talisayon, *Distinct Elements of Filipino Values: Cross-National Comparisons*, 11-12.

¹¹ *Understanding Philippine Social Realities through the Filipino Family*. Manila: ASI, 1984, 48.

¹² *Re-Rooting Mission in the Family*, *Mission Studies*, XIX, 1-37, 2002, 139.

Coming Home to the Filipino Values of Love

As pointed out earlier, the finality of the vows is the Christian value of love. Love is a universal value that is present in every culture. However, every culture understands and expresses love in its own typical way. And there are certainly typical Filipino expressions of love.

The value of love occupies a central place in the Filipino value system. This indicates that there are other values that stand in relation to it as instrumental values. There are other Filipino values that are in the service of love or at love's command, values that serve as means and instruments of fostering and expressing love. To be precise, inculturating the vows means the creative encounter between the vows and the Filipino instrumental values of love. It is seeking to incarnate, embody the vows in typical Filipino expressions of love.

But to whom does the task of inculturation pertain? Certainly, the task belongs to the religious community. Yet, the Filipino religious themselves are called to be the primary though not the exclusive agents of inculturating the vows. They should be in a better position to do it. Why? As religious, they know well the meaning of their vows. And as Filipinos, they also must know well their culture, the Filipino expressions of love. Unfortunately, the Filipino religious seem to have missed for a long time the link between their vows and the Filipino instrumental values of love, or the link between their culture and religious life. One fundamental reason is the fact that religious life has been seen largely as culturally discontinuous from life at home. Another reason must be the general lack of positive appreciation of the "riches," of the good and beautiful elements of the Filipino culture even among the Filipino religious themselves. Remotely speaking, not to be forgotten is the historical factor that though religious life began to be present in the Philippines with the arrival of the first missionaries, the admission of local candidates into religious life did not happen much until the beginning only of the last century. As a result, only a few decades ago did the local religious begin to assume principal roles in leadership and formation.

Yet, it can be said that religious formation does not begin in the formation house, but from within the family, from home. A candidate's feelings, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and values about life and God are first imbibed and learned from home. The Christian home from whom every religious comes is the first formation community, with parents as first formators. As *Familiaris Consortio* affirms, the family is "a school of following Christ."¹³ Speaking of love, the family is the first school of love. A popular experiential insight says it all: "Charity begins at home." It is at home that Filipino religious first learned and practiced the Christian virtue of love, inclusive of the instrumental values of love. Sadly, the religious training in living the

¹³ No. 39.

vows continues to be clothed mainly in foreign categories. It does not seek to build on the Filipino experience and practice of love from home.

Hence, if the Filipino religious are to inculturate their vows, they are to rediscover their typical Filipino ways of expressing love from home. They are to affirm the instrumental values of love, which they have learned back from home, and let these values enter into creative dialogical encounter with the vows. When this happens, a mutual learning and transformation occurs. The values give new expressions to the vows; the vows in turn impart new dimensions to the values.

PART III – FILIPINO REINTERPRETATIONS OF THE VOWS

New interpretations of the vows arise when they are expressed through the instrumental values of love from home. What follows now is a creative rendition of each vow as each is interpreted through a specific Filipino value.

A. CHASTITY AS HOSPITALITY

A Universal Gift-Love

Vowed chastity, more than a renunciation of marriage, is a question of loving as Christ loves us. It is receiving his love and responding in love to him. It is falling in love with Christ, entering into a primary love relationship with Him, to the point of renouncing any other primary love-commitment, like marriage. It also means loving, as Christ loves. The love of Christ is not only a total love but also a universal one, absolutely inclusive. It pertains to marriage to be a visible expression of Christ's total and exclusive love for a human person while it belongs to vowed chastity to be a re-enactment of Christ's universal gift-love to all humans. Hence, chastity is a commitment of seeking to love each and every human being as Christ does. It is to love after the manner of Christ's universal gift-love. Chastity is charity, a love of friendship extended to all.

Filipino Hospitality

Is there a Filipino value, which means a universal gift-love? Do Filipinos know universal love from home? The answer is yes and the name of that value is hospitality. And Filipinos know by heart what hospitality is, right from home. There is no single word that expresses what Filipinos mean by hospitality. But, there are idiomatic expressions that express the rich meaning and practice of hospitality.

The first idiomatic expression is *Tuloy po kayo sa loob*. *Tuloy po* means literally "Please come in." It is a welcome greeting extended to every person, regardless of

age, gender, color, creed, social standing in the community. It is extended to relatives, friends and acquaintances as well as to guests and strangers. It is a welcome accorded to a person because he is a person, without any discrimination. *Sa loob* means literally “inside” or “inside [the house].” But *loob* is a Tagalog word for the self. It signifies the inner self, which for the Filipinos is the true or authentic self. It stands for the person “within.” In addition, to the Filipinos, the external space or house is a symbol and an extension of the inner self. Hence, *tuloy po sa loob* means more than welcoming and accepting a person into the house. It is welcoming and accepting a person into one’s own inner self, into one’s own heart and mind, into one’s own person. It belongs to love to welcome a person. As the poet George Herbert exclaimed: “Love bade me welcome.” Hospitality is a *welcoming love*. It is a *person’s welcoming love* for a *kapwa*, a co-person.

The other complementary idiomatic expression for hospitality is *Kain po tayo*, which literally means, “Let us eat.” As soon as the person is greeted *Tuloy po kayo sa loob*, the next thing that follows is the invitation, *Kain po tayo*. Immediately, the person is invited to eat or partake of some food or drink. If the family is eating at the arrival of a person, a seat at the table is at once made available for the newcomer. At times, providing for the needs of guests is done to the point of excess, beyond one’s economic means, which practice needs to be corrected. Nevertheless, one could not find fault for the Filipinos’ spontaneous desire to provide, to their best capacities, for the needs of their guests.

The expression, *Kain po tayo*, is not simply an invitation to the other person to share food with his host. For the Filipinos, sharing food is a symbol of a social tie, of sharing life. Hence, *Kain po tayo* is an invitation to partake of the goods of life of the host, to share what he has in life. Hospitality, for the Filipinos, is not only welcoming and accepting the other person but also seeking to provide for his/her needs as a person. It is becoming a host to the other person’s life. Hospitality is not only a welcoming love but also a *nurturing love*. In sum, hospitality is a welcoming and nurturing love for all human persons who come into the lives of Filipino families.

At times, the practice of the vow of chastity is characterized by negativity. The one sided emphasis on detachment from persons and control of desires, affections and emotions has resulted to the lack of appreciation if not the negation of all personal love relationships and friendships. This also has led to rigid or sterile affective life among many religious. Given to incessant activities, they have lost touch of their own persons and that of others. They are more focused on the values of work and efficiency than on persons and meaningful interpersonal relationships. They tend to be impersonal, less welcoming and nurturing of persons with whom they live or work.

The interpretation of chastity as hospitality can be a critique and corrective of such practice of chastity. Hospitality would enable a vowed person to welcome any person with freedom and spontaneous affectivity. It would lead him to be concerned or to care for the needs of a person willingly and generously. It would place him in a position to extend a welcoming and nurturing love to every person that he/she encounters in life.

Many forms of hostility--abuses, exploitation, violence and attacks--against the dignity of persons exist in our times, especially against the weak and the poor. In utilitarian and consumerist societies, people are treated as commodities whose services can be bought and like gadgets are easily put aside the moment they malfunction or become less efficient. In the face of hedonism and worship of the sexual instinct and pleasure, persons, especially women and children, become objects of sexual gratification. Sex has become a consumer good and sexuality is reduced to a plaything. Chastity as hospitality is a witness against and is a counter value to all these forms of hostility against human persons and human dignity in our modern culture. Hospitality gives us humans the vision of seeing every man/woman as a person to welcome and nurture in love.

B. POVERTY AS SHARING

Divestment for Love's Sake

Economic poverty in itself is a social evil. All people wage war against economic insufficiency. The Church in all its social encyclicals is against the existence of poverty among peoples. Poverty is a subversion of the universal destination of the earth's goods and God's love-covenant with his people. God in his provident love has created and provided for all the needs of humanity and desired that there shall be no poor among his people. (Cf. Deut 15:4) Even in the New Testament, poverty is not a blessing in itself. The poor are blessed not because of poverty itself but because "the reign of God is theirs" (Cf. Lk 6: 20). And those who attend to the needs of the "least" are "blessed" (Mt 25:40).

Neither economic wealth, the opposite of poverty, is unqualifiedly good. Scriptures abound with passages warning the dangers of riches. Wealth can be a "treacherous thing" (Hab 2:5). It can subvert one's right relationship with God as man's greatest security/treasure (Cf. Lk 12: 13-21) or blind man to the needs of his neighbor (Cf. Lk 16: 19-31).

A beautiful text from the book of Proverbs cautions against the dangers both of poverty and riches: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; [provide me only the food I need;] lest, being full, I deny you, saying, 'Who is the Lord?' Or, being in want, I steal and profane the name of my God."

In the light of this, the vow of poverty goes beyond the question of poverty and wealth. It is not an adoption of one in favor of another. Neither poverty nor wealth is the ideal. No one should promise to embrace economic insufficiency in itself. The heart of the matter of the so-called vow of poverty is not economic poverty. While the vow of poverty entails the renunciation of material goods, it is not a commitment to a life of economic destitution in itself. Rather, by making such act of renunciation, one thereby, as it were, “relativizes” the value of material or economic goods because one sees where the greater treasure lies. The heart of vowed poverty is in the attitude of finding the true treasure in one’s relationship with God and persons. In the words of Jesus: “None of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his possessions” (Lk 14:33). And, “Make friends for yourselves through your use of this world’s goods, so that when they fail you, a lasting reception will be yours” (Lk 16: 9). In other words, the heart of the vowed poverty is giving in our lives first place to God and human persons and thereby placing material goods in the service of our relationship with God and our neighbor.

Such positive understanding of vowed poverty is rooted in the poverty of Christ himself. St. Paul best explains the poverty of Christ when he writes to the Corinthians: “You are well acquainted with the favor shown you by our Lord Jesus Christ: how for your sake he made himself poor though he was rich, so that you might become rich by his poverty” (2Cor 8:9). Christ’s poverty is his self-emptying as he gives himself to humankind. It is not only poverty at the level of having but more so at the level of being. Its orientation is immensely positive: his poverty is meant to enrich others, us. Needless to say, his poverty is at the same time his self-giving to God, to the glory of his Father, and to us for our own good. The poverty of Christ is his self-emptying and his offering of all that he is and has *at the service of the love of God and people*.

Poverty at the service of love is exemplified too in the life-example of the first Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 4: 32-35). They enriched one another by each other’s poverty, precisely by pooling together all their resources and by sharing them to one another according to each one’s needs. As a result no one was needy among them. Seeing their life of sharing, the pagans were led to exclaim: “See how they love one another.”

Vowed poverty then is a means of loving God and neighbor after the love of the poor Christ. In relation to God, it is to love God above all things and to receive all as his gifts. In relation to neighbor, it is a radical sharing with others whatever one has and what one is. In a word, vowed poverty is sharing at love’s service.

The Filipino Value of Sharing

Filipinos grow up with the value of sharing from home. They are trained to share from early childhood. As soon as a Filipino child is old enough to understand something, his parents train him to share.

He is first trained to share with others whatever food he has. With any food given to a child by father or mother, comes the instruction to share it with his brothers or sisters. He is taught not to take any food without first a word or gesture of offering to share it with anybody close by. He is advised not to keep any food just for himself. The practice of sharing food is extended among relatives, friends, and immediate neighbors. Filipinos in rural areas tend to share with those around them the first harvest of products from their farms, a big catch of fish, fruits or vegetables from backyard gardens. Celebrations of important events or blessings in life never happen without sharing food in plenty with one's kinfolks and friends. Filipinos learned the value of sharing food so well that even in their adulthood they never skip the ritual of offering food to a neighbor before taking it.

Filipinos have an extensive experience of sharing material things from home. For countless times, their parents, brothers, sisters and relatives have shared some material things with them: namely, clothes, shoes, toys, dolls, books, money, etc. Among the immediate members of the nuclear or extended family, those who are older or have more in life are expected to share with those who are younger or have less in life. In a sense, Filipinos have been nurtured in life by all kinds of sharing of material goods from those around him.

At home, Filipinos at a tender age are taught to share opportunities. Children have to take turns in being cuddled by father or mother, being lifted up to the air by father, or in going out of the house in the company of parent. A child is taught to share the use of toys or dolls with his siblings or friends. When the family is economically strapped, children have to wait for each other's turn to get a new pair of shoes, school bag, clothes, etc. When a family could not afford to send the children to school all at the same time, priority is given to the elder one with a tacit understanding that afterwards he/she will help the next child go on with schooling.

Filipinos too are formed to share responsibilities at home. The household chores are shared among the siblings. Older siblings are trained to care or be responsible for the younger ones. Children as soon as they are able, have to share in the burdens of father or mother in running the family. When grown up siblings begin to earn on their own, as long as they reside in their parental homes, they are to share the fruits of their labor with their families.

It is also from home that Filipinos begin to share with others their aspirations and dreams, hopes and struggles, pains and joys in life. Sharing at this level goes beyond the material and personal goods; it is a sharing of what one treasures most in life, what one keeps intimately in one's heart. It is a sharing of one's person to another person. When such kind of sharing becomes mutual, there is a reciprocal gift of self-revelation and enrichment of each other's person.

All the above forms of sharing are expressions of Filipinos' generous love for their families, relatives and friends. Sharing material blessings and gifts is a means and an instrument of love of neighbor.

As the core meaning of the vow of poverty is sharing, the Filipino value of sharing fits naturally as an indigenous expression of the same vow. When this happens, the value of sharing achieves a new meaning while the practice of the vow of poverty becomes enriched and prophetic.

Poverty as sharing makes the practice of the vow positive and active. Instead of the often legalistic and sterile criterion of having less or more, the religious would be more concerned of their capacity to share whatever they have or are. The religious would be more conscious of becoming responsible stewards of whatever material resources they wield in their hands. They would focus on the issue of how well to utilize such resources for the betterment of the lives of the deprived and needy. They would be motivated to live simple lives so that they will have more to share. Through the value of sharing religious would grow in the spirit of detachment and overcome the divisive potential of material things in their own communities as well as between them and the people whom they serve or work with.

Sharing makes the practice of vowed poverty prophetic for sharing testifies against the acquisitive and materialistic characteristics of the contemporary culture. It is a critique of greediness, extravagance, hoarding and stinginess. It is an alternative value to the excessive pursuit of material things by the rich and powerful heedless of the needs and sufferings of the poor and at the expense of ecological balance. Poverty as sharing becomes a witness against oppression, exploitation and injustice in our times. It is a corrective value to the widening gap between the rich and the poor, massive poverty in the midst of the riches of the world. It leads to solidarity with the poor in their struggles for justice and the integrity of creation.

C. OBEDIENCE AS PAG-USAPAN NATIN

Knowing and Doing God's Will

Vowed obedience is not sheer submission of one's will to the will of the superior. In the first place, obedience is directed to the will of God, not to that of any superior. The claim that "the voice of the superior is the voice of God" is, to say the least, a misleading figure of speech. There is no equivalence between the voice of God and the voice of the superior. Nor the will of the superior is infallibly the will of God. Countless abuses and violations against human persons, both within and outside the religious circles, were results of such misguided interpretation of God's will.

Obedience is derived from the Latin verb, *oboedire*, to listen. It is taken from two words, *ob*, an intensive prefix, and *audire*, to listen. Hence, *oboedire*, literally means to listen intently. It is interpersonal, involving at least two persons: the one who listens and follows the command, and the other who gives an order about something to be done. It requires a communicative process on something to be done between two parties. As a communicative process on what is to be done, it requires the use of intelligence and will of both parties, in freedom. Of special concern to be safeguarded is the free use of intellect and will on the part of the one who follows a command. Otherwise, obedience becomes dominative or manipulative.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, obedience is first an act of the intellect before it is an act of the will. Why? Because the act of knowing the practical truth or good to be done (which is an act of the practical intellect) precedes the act of commanding and of "willing" or agreeing to what is commanded (which is the act of the will). True obedience is first knowing the demand of God's will and then willing and doing it. The popular axiom: "Blind obedience is perfect obedience" is no obedience at all. It is nothing but a "blind" act and does not even qualify as a human act.

The heart then of the vow of obedience is the attitude of seeking to know and to do the will of God. However, it must be noted that humans do not immediately know the will of God. The will of God is mediated to human individuals both by *objective* and *subjective* sources. Among the objective sources are: sacred scriptures, divine tradition and the official teachings of the Magisterium of the Church. For the religious we have to add: the religious rule, constitutions, directories, other legislations and sound traditions of each religious institute. The following can be named among the subjective sources: the pope, Episcopal college and bishops. For the religious, we have to include the superiors and members of their communities. In both spheres of the objective and subjective sources, the quest of knowing God's will and its demands is an ecclesial or communitarian process and effort. No one has the monopoly of the exercise of discernment and of the

gifts of wisdom and knowledge. All are participants and partners in the search for God's will. The Holy Spirit is present and active in each and every member of the religious community.

That goes to say, the search for God's will, required by the vow of obedience, cannot but be interpersonal, interactive or communitarian. It entails a two-way process of communication, a mutual speaking and listening. Not only the superior but also every individual member of the community has a word to say. Both have also to be listened to. It is a dialogue in prayer between God and individuals and community, a dialogue among superiors and members of religious communities. In practice, vowed obedience cannot but be dialogical. In this way, every person is able to share his thoughts, feelings, insights and experiences about any matter under discussion or deliberation. Though members have their own minds they think together and learn from each other and strive to arrive at a consensus or a general agreement on what is the practical truth to be done. Obedience makes the members of the community one heart one mind in learning and doing together the demands of God's will. It draws them closer to one another in truth and love.

Pag-usapan Natin

Do Filipinos know the value of dialogue? The answer is "yes" and it is called *pag-usapan natin*. *Pag-usapan natin*, literally means, "Let us talk." However, it is more than an invitation to talk things over. It signifies a positive and respectful disposition to the other, a willingness to sit across the table as equals, openness to discover and learn the views of the other, the hope to clarify and thresh out differences and the aspiration to arrive at a harmonious agreement or resolution of an issue or question. Hence, it includes too the idea of taking time for an exhaustive consideration of the matter at hand, so that what comes at the end is what everybody sees and agrees as the true and just thing to be done, with the participating parties coming out of the conversation with a better understanding of each other than before.

Pag-usapan natin is a cherished mode of *pag-uusap* (conversation) among the Filipinos. Nobody would find fault to an invitation to *pag-usapan natin* and hardly anyone would turn down such invitation. It is practiced at home, at the work place and at the neighborhood community for small or big issues but which require the knowledge and consent of everyone concerned. "True dialogue happens here in *pag-usapan natin* because here everyone is expected and is given to think with, deliberate with, talk with, discover with, and share with one another (whether with the one in authority or among equals) whatever is in the *loob or kalooban* [inner self]"¹⁴ More than a means of getting things done together, it is done at the service of maintaining

¹⁴ Joseph Raquid, OP and Giuseppe Pietro Arsciwals, OP, *The Vow of Obedience as Pag-usapan Natin*, Colloquia Manilana, IV, 1996, 34.

harmonious relationships among the participants. *Pag-usapan natin* is Filipino dialogue at the service of harmony and love.

Vowed obedience as dialogue is a corrective of the practice of obedience as sheer subjection to the will of superiors. Such view of obedience is oftentimes viewed as a necessary evil; something that one would like to do away with, if only there is another way of doing things in community. Worse, it is done not without fear, misgiving, hurt feelings and grumbling which altogether drive persons farther away from one another.

In many places of the world, the interests and voices of the poor, the weak and minorities are silenced or unheeded. They have no say at all in matters that profoundly concerned them. They are exploited and manipulated by the mighty and wealthy in society. Those in positions of authority are prone to become dictators, manipulators or pawns of influential groups with vested selfish interests. Dialogical obedience or *pag-usapan natin* is a critique and a counter value to the imposition of will by force and violence and the domination of the weak by the strong.¹⁵

Our modern life is characterized by noise and incessant activities. People are always up on their feet, on the go, racing against time to meet big targets or quotas, driven by the goals of efficiency and profits. The fast paced and pressure-laden life dulls the capacities of people, including the religious, to look deeply into the nature of things, to reflect on the complexities of life, to listen to their own hearts and that of others. Dialogical obedience is a call to listen more to God to hear his voice speaking to them especially through his Word, personal experiences and the events of history. It is also a call to listen deeply to one another so as to be drawn together in unity and love in the fulfillment of the demands of God's will towards the realization of God's kingdom.

PART IV – CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have started off in this reflection with a fresh look at the vows as all meaning love. Then we have moved back to the recognition of the values of love from home. Finally, we have reinterpreted the vows through three specific instrumental values of love from home. Learning how to love has been our focus here. As the poet, William Blake, wrote: “And we are put here on earth a little space/ that we might learn the beams of love.”¹⁶ If life is learning the beams of love, the beams of love for religious men and women are the three vows. It is the three vows, like beams, that hold together their “house,” life of love.

¹⁵ Cf. Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, 463.

¹⁶ As quoted by Gerald G. May, *The Awakened Heart*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993, 1.

Bearing Much Love

There is only one motive why we have gone through this whole reflection, that is, to bear more fruits of love. After all, the reason for our religious calling is none other than this. As Jesus himself puts it: “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures” (Jn 15:16).

But we can bear more fruit only if we are true to ourselves, to our ways of loving as Filipinos. Thus, we have revisited the Filipino home, where we have been rooted in the value of loving. We are thankful and happy to discover that the Filipino “beams of love” have long been with us early on from our formation at home. There are instrumental values of love from home that have great potentials in empowering our vows to bear much fruit of love.

Gerald G. May has a beautiful description of bearing love: “There are three meanings of bearing love: to endure it, to carry it and to bring it forth. In the first, we are meant to grow in our capacity to endure love’s beauty and pain. In the second, we are meant to carry love and spread it around, as children carry laughter and measles. And in the third, we are meant to bring new love into the world, to be birthers of love.”¹⁷ Borrowing his words, it is my hope that by living our vows through our Filipino values: we have greater capacity “to endure love’s beauty and pain,” “to carry love and spread it around, as children carry laughter and measles,” and “to bring new love into the world.”

¹⁷ Ibid.