Theology at the Rough Grounds
Conceptual Trajectories of a Method

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This article is an attempt to outline the conceptual resources of "doing theology at the rough grounds" in seven keywords – location, praxis, dialogue partners, methods, see-judge-act, rough grounds and questions. Acknowledging that all theologies are contextual, it begins by accounting the author's social location and his search for theoretical resources that resonated with his concerns, specifically his passion for the people whom he holds dear. This search has brought him to dialogue-partners and allies mostly outside of the theological world. Their insights have influenced his search for a theological method and his faltering efforts to make theology liberative and meaningful in our times. He ends his article with attempts at answering some questions which were asked of him, and the challenge toward a reflexive silence in the rough grounds.

Introduction

This article is one of the hardest to write. I am not used to reading back the things that I have written, much less reflect on my own trajectory. If I have written them, they were concrete responses to specific needs in different contexts; and not really a product of an overall academic project. For there is no such thing. But in this project, for the first time in my life, I am forced to look back into them and found out that they are very disparate pieces. I think that theology is always a tentative, piecemeal, and most often, faltering attempts to provide an answer to questions asked of us at specific moments. At best, they intend to be provisional pointers on where God might be speaking at certain historical junctures. And they should remain that way.

But I can also sense a running thread, a burning passion, a deep concern underlying all of these reflections. I can still remember the feelings when I was writing them. I feel I was

resonating with a group of people on the "rough grounds" from where I come – they who are closest to my heart and with whom I am most at home. If not with them, I was addressing a wider audience – sometimes the academe, most often far from my context – and tried my best to share with the latter the pains and aspirations of the former, their faith and their lives, their hopes and their fears.

I am not actually sure if I am preoccupied with doing theology or philosophy or sociology understood in terms of issues, debates and canons within these disciplinary boundaries. I only happen to be called a "theologian" because I graduated in a school that gave me such a degree. But I don't really care. Being faithful to some disciplinary specializations has never been in my professional radar. What I care about is simple. It has always been my aspiration that people in the margins find meaning and hope in the way the Church names, understands and exhorts how people live their everyday realities. It is my desire, in the end, that what people find most important – their relationships, work, love, food, joy, faith and God – resonate some sense of joy in their hearts and provide hope and well-being, not fear and alienation. If social analysis, theory building and theological method feature in my theological screen, they are always viewed from the lens of these very important realities in the lives of these people. For me, the test of my academic work is when these friends in the rough grounds who are close to my heart can find meaning in the discourse I am engaged in and can find solace in the work that I do.

I am also aware that this does not happen most of the time. When I finished defending my dissertation, I went home to my little village to celebrate among subsistence farmers and fisher folks whom I grew up with in my earlier years. They are our neighbors, the friends of my parents, of all of us siblings and their children. We know their stories and they know ours. I celebrated a thanksgiving mass with them, and in all my joy and sense of gratitude, presented a copy of my dissertation to the people and thanked them for their support and inspiration. Of course, the people clapped and congratulated me. During the simple reception of *camote*, *mais, sea weeds* and *tuba* (sweet potato, corn and local coconut wine), everyone forgot about the book that lay on the altar except a simple woman who skimmed through it, smile and

whispered in Cebuano: *"Di man ko kasabot Padre. Iningles man diay. Naa kay Bibliya nga binisaya. Mangayo unta ko. Basin mas makatabang na kaysa ani."* (I cannot understand this Father. It's written in English. Do you have a Visayan bible? I would like to ask if you have. Maybe that is more helpful).

If this happens often, how do I figure out my work to be? If I am not understood at all by my neighbors, my parents and siblings included, I can imagine myself as a local who is explaining to a tourist (to someone who lives from far away) what people do in my village – how we live, how we work, how we love, how we believe. I should also be able to tell my neighbors from which world this tourist comes from, what language he speaks and why is she here in our village. It is a formidable task since – in speaking with the tourist I should not forget the language of my village. Moreover, I should also be able to speak the language of the foreign tourist, at least enough for him to understand. In short, I should be faithful to both. I think that is what theology is all about.

I would like to trace this theological story with the help of seven keywords: *location, praxis, dialogue partners, methods, see-judge-act, rough grounds* and *questions*. I know this attempt to explain is also a construct. Life has never been a neat narrative; it is a series of trials and errors, attempts and misfires, mistakes and realizations. So, what I write is not really like what it was. Again, it is an attempt to tell a tourist, one who is foreign to my life, the journey that I tried to travel or, better still, the path that I should have trod.

LOCATION

There is no universal theology. All theologies are contextual. Melchior Cano's classic *De Locis Theologicis* (1653)[1] speaks of several *loci* in this twelve-volume work: Sacred Scriptures, oral tradition, the Catholic Church, the Councils, the Roman Church, Holy Fathers, scholastic theologians, human sciences, philosophy and history. Most of these are understood in a

[1] For a reliable commentary on this classical work, see T. Tshibangu, *Melchior Cano et la théologie positive* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1964).

universalist sense.

Beyond Cano's list, however, I would like to say that social location itself is a *locus theologicus*. And social location is always local. It is my social location that sensitizes me to the living faith and aspirations of well-being among peoples in the margins.[2] In short, it is these simple people whom I grew up with who taught me about life, struggle and faith. They brought me to their little farms and led me to appreciate how the corns grow from seeds to seedlings, from leaf to tassel, from ear to grain. In these constant and regular visits, it is they who imparted to me the necessary patience we all need as we wait for the harvest. They brought me to the sea with them, instructed me how to swim, how to catch fish – and the struggle with one's body on water in order to counter the strong currents, or to let go in order not to tire oneself so much. They trained me how to dive for the fish or to wait until one eats the bait. This alternate seasons of struggling and letting go, of working and waiting, of passionate activity and patient contemplation mark their entire days. Before sundown, they all gather together in my mother's small sari-sari store to tell stories, to share a glass of tuba or just to relax as we, children, play *tubig-tubig,* hide-and-seek and other local games. It was not yet the time for Dota, smart phones and Pokemon Go. In hindsight, I realize that these significant moments of 'being' form part of our 'doing'; just as our 'doing' is considered to be the source of our 'being'. *Praxis*, *theoria* and back!

This pattern marks their lives as it also serves as a matrix of their relationship with their God. They brought me to their prayer moments in the evening rosaries or praying for the dead during wakes. It is the same pattern that I saw. People struggle to utter the Hail Mary's despite sleepiness and fatigue but they also burst in lively song and celebration, especially when the time to conclude it has come and the snacks of *camote* and *tuba* is ready to be served. Life on the rough ground is a mixture of everything – activism and contemplation, praxis and theory, prayer and action, rest and

[2] For parallel reflection, see Justaert, Kristien. "Interview with Daniel Franklin Pilario," Newsletter CLT 3 (2012), accessed 09.22.2016, http://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr_lib/pilario-interview.pdf.

celebration – one in all, all in one. No preference, no precedence, no higher criterion. And these people were, for me, the first theologians.

I grew up in a small village Hagdan, Oslob, Cebu in Central Philippines – a place quite far and remote to which there was only one bus that plied the rough roads from the city each day. Access to economic, academic or cultural opportunities were also remote, so much so that many of my playmates did not even finish high school and merely ended as subsistence farmers or fishermen the whole of their lives. We are not only found in the geographic margins. We were also marginalized by a lot of other social forces both local and national – from the scorn city people have on our accent to their condescending looks at our rural ways; from political warlords to economic monopolies – all these contributing to our marginalized *habitus*.

When I was given the opportunity to study philosophy and theology, it was these people – all of them, my family, relatives, cousins and friends – who were foremost in my mind. When I later worked in parish community organizing, the more their voices became clearer and their cries louder; this time in another location. I was confronted with this abject poverty right before my eyes, right within my family, neighbors and mission areas. Immersion programs were not new to me. I was already immersed in poverty since birth. What was new was the post-immersion realization. It sharpened my consciousness of poverty and its causes, of its visible effects and embodied consequences. It led me to ask the question why. This social location led me to Marxism and its allied disciplines in philosophy and sociology. Despite studying Thomism for years, the first philosopher that made sense to me was Marx and his companions. They helped me understand the complexity of our impoverished situation. In short, I entered the world of theology from the lens of critical theory explicated in philosophical and sociological fields.

Praxis

There was one philosophical-sociological concept that captured my imagination: praxis. The term was popular among

social activists. It was also a byword among progressive theologians. It was the height of the Marcos dictatorship when I was studying philosophy and theology. People were imprisoned; others disappeared; and students were demonstrating on the streets. I once heard my esteemed professor say – and this sentence did not leave my mind – "Only the conscientized masses are capable of praxis."[3] I started wondering, who are the "masses"; what does it mean to be "conscientized"; and what consists "praxis". Later I found out that to be conscientized meant belonging to a revolutionary party and to do praxis is to help advance the cause of the proletariat. The terms were becoming more difficult. In concrete, it actually meant that in order to be a committed Christian, you should be a NatDem (National Democrat), a SocDem (Social Democrat) or a Maoist-Leninist, etc. There were fierce differences among these groups that can cause one to lose life and limbs. But that is precisely the point. One's commitment to the "masses" is supposed to be the burning passion of one's life. Hearing all these, I was at loss, at best, and marginalized, at worst – because I was not an affiliate to either one or the other. I had the same aspirations for freedom and liberation but I did not speak their language nor did I belong.

But that was not my concern. I have always been thinking of my neighbors. Were they the "masses"? Were they "conscientized"? Are their labors, struggles and lives considered "praxis"? The resounding answer of the dominant Left was "no". The poor masses still needed to be formed and conscientized. Their "inert" status and ignorance will not bring them to real liberation. From Mao's revolutionary perspective, the poor peasants and rural masses can also be viewed like a "mass" which, in physics, means a property of a physical body that resists acceleration or a formless entity, like a "mass of clay" that needed shaping into something useful. This condescending attitude toward the so-called "masses" is common to upper and middle classes – both in the academe and

[3] A parallel account is found in Daniel Franklin Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven: Peeters and Leuven University Press, 2005), xxv-xxvi.

religious life – who decide to work "for the people".[4] Thus, even as these self-styled radicals dedicate their lives to the people, even as they try as much as possible to forget their middle class lifestyles and live in the mountains or squatter areas, they will never be like the "masses" they have described. Their tendency to look down on them are ingrained in their middle class *habitus*. The masses will always be beyond them – sometimes denigrated, sometimes romanticized – but always classified. In truth, "there are in fact no masses," Raymond Williams says.[5] Masses are other people whom we do not know, who do not speak like us, who are far from our own circles of intimate signification. Calling them "masses" can be our way of classifying them.

Did my neighbors mind? It did not really matter to them at all. It was the least of their preoccupations. But my inner sensibilities were rebelling at this utmost marginalization. The poor have always been marginalized not only in economic, political, socio-cultural and religious universes but also in the way dominant society views, values, and talks about them and their lives.

This realization sets me on a long journey in pursuit of a concept. First, I discovered that Aristotle's idea of *praxis* is at best elitist, thus, disqualifying the people who labor. It was only for the men [sic] of leisure capable of discussing politics in the agora. He also rejects *poeisis* (and contrasted it to moral *praxis*) because this type of labor by the merchants, workers and slaves is "noisy", productive, technical and instrumentalist. However, we have also discovered in a deeper look that Aristotle also talks about *phronetic techne* – a skillful combination of technical know-how and moral vision, of cunning intelligence (*metis*) and ethical wisdom (*phronesis*). In Aristotle, what was seen as total opposite (that is *praxis*

[4] Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), 192-197. See also in D. F. Pilario, "The Craft of Contextual Theology: Towards a Methodological Conversation in the Philippine Context," *Chakana: Intercultural Forum for Philosophy and Theology* 1 (2003): 19-42; Cf. revised version published in *Hapag: An Interdisciplanary Theological Journal* 1, no.1 (2004), 5-39.

[5] R. Williams, *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953 [1998]), 184.

and *poeisis*) were in fact a complex elements of human action, thus, paving the way toward the rehabilitation of the slave and his labor in the context of the Greek *polis*. Aristotle, however, did not pursue this direction to its real consequences. In the end, Aristotelian ethics remained elitist even if it is the most egalitarian among political theories. Only the free and leisurely men members of the polis who can discuss leisurely in the agora are capable of praxis. The voices of the poor, the slaves, the women, even the foreign merchants and skilled workers, were excluded in that so-called equal society.[6]

Marx recommenced from where Aristotle has left off.[7] Praxis became a byword for Marxists. Marx's philosophy came to be known as "philosophy of praxis". Ironically, however, Marx himself seldom used the word nor do we find any definition on it in his writings. But we have also found out that what was scorned by Aristotle as non-leisurely "noisy productive activity" became in Marx's hands the essential characteristic of our being human. We are an *homo faber* – and our labor should be non-alienating in the context of capitalist societies which Marx was trying so much to unmask. Praxis was the project to make humans achieve a non-alienated *poeisis*.

From Marx, we examined contemporary discourses on praxis and/or practice in anthropological and sociological sciences and we found out that practice in its (post)modern uses focuses on the familiar, the everyday and the ordinary. Bereft of telic connotations in Aristotle and Marx, and despite their ordinariness, these practices are also subversive of the status quo. Michel de Certeau, for instance, talks about "everyday practices" of the "ordinary man" like cooking or walking as "tactics" and the "trickery of the weak".[8] These practices are bereft of place so they could never strategize for an assault. They only poach on the dominant and play on their terrains. Ordinary practices are tactics not done with malice. In fact, these activities are the most ordinary

[6] D. F. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds,* 1-29.

[7] Ibid., 44-56.

[8] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans., S. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

practices diligently done in their honest will to survive. And the less strategic and tactical they are, the more effective are their subversive consequences.

What is at stake in this long conceptual journey? I was trying to search for theoretical resources from which to ground my academic agenda for the people on the ground who have been marginalized and excluded, both in practice and in theory. Despite the hegemony of dominant interpretations of praxis, we have shown that there are "cracks on the wall". Alternative slants of meaning, in fact, showed ways to rehabilitate ordinary people and everyday work, thus, paving the way to the revaluing of their voices. We have witnessed in Aristotle the denigration of *praxis* and *poeisis* and the enthronement of leisure and contemplation in the world of *theoria*. However, contemporary theories like Wittgenstein, inverts the equation. Theory in itself is useless unless they are brought back to the rough ground of praxis. He writes: "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground!"[9] This shift in discourse has great consequences to theology. We will go back to this later.

DIALOGUE PARTNERS

With such preoccupation in mind, I began searching for a theological method that gives voice to the perspective of people on the rough ground. I thought to myself, if I am going to be a theologian, I should know how to do theology that emerges from their lives, they who first taught me about life and about God. I have read about, encountered in action and studied several methodological proposals. The most contemporary, popular and classical of them all was Lonergan's *Method in Theology.*[10] He talked of functional specializations as eight distinct tasks in theology, of

[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §107.

[10] Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

disciplines that look at the past and of fields that intend to explore the future. Central to these interdisciplinary investigations is the experience of "conversion" in the theologian as s/he deals with the data of the theological field. Such subjective experience of "conversion" is not only religious but also intellectual and moral, leading to an authentic human life. However, despite all his scholarship, I did not feel at home with Lonergan's method. The question that preoccupies me was still the voices from the rough ground. How can our theologies listen, appropriate and take account of the people's simple faith without sophistication, of their everyday life full of uncertainties, and of their unschooled categories, quite opposite to Lonergan's erudite and highly scholastic language. Subjective may be my feeling, I honestly was not convinced that these nagging questions were satisfactorily answered. So, I kept on looking.

From the medieval times, theology had its handmaid, i.e., philosophy. The Latin adage goes: "*philosophia est ancilla theologiae*". In that universe, theology was the queen, philosophy was its servant.[11] In recent times, theology does not anymore talk of servants but of interlocutors and dialogue partners. In all these shifts and changes, my question remains the same: where are the voices of people in the margins? I found later on some allies from other fields other than theology. Let me mention several dialogue-partners: Raymond Williams, Antonio Gramsci, Michel de Certeau, James Scott, Pierre Bourdieu, Reynaldo Ileto and others, to mention the more influential ones. None of them are theologians. Most were even atheists, skeptics or did not care at all about faith affiliations. No one was concerned about theological method. But their philosophical and sociological frameworks resonated with and was most sensitive to my basic concern.

[11] For theology's relationship with philosophy and other sciences, see Agnes Brazal and D. F. Pilario, "Disciplines, Interdisciplinarity and Theology," *Hapag: An Interdisciplinary Theological Journal* 4, nos.1-2 (2007): 5-25. Also found in http://www.philjol.info/philjol/index.php/HAPAG/article/view/657/603 (accessed 09.22.2016).

As mentioned earlier, it was Raymond Williams who sensitized me to look at the so-called "masses" as both victims of power and a force of resistance. Raymond Henry Williams (1921-1988) was a Welsh neo-Marxist responsible for the emergence of the New Left and the contemporary discipline called "cultural studies". Though seemingly crushed by capitalism that has gone global in our times, argues Williams, people in the margins are not totally coopted, much less entirely crushed and defeated. All systems, no matter how dominant they become, leaves some "cracks on the wall", that is made possible by the contributions of those at the edges of specific hegemonies. Any social order is a curious and indeterminate mix of "formal and articulate systems of meanings" of the dominant power and of the "inarticulate consciousness of the marginalized," engendering what Gramsci calls the counter-hegemonic moment. "No dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy and human intention."[12] Williams insists that "there is always, though in varying degrees, practical consciousness, in specific relationships, specific skills, specific perceptions, that is unquestionably social and that a specifically dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize."[13] This realist framework, cognizant of both contemporary subjugation and active resistance, gives a sense of hope to people on the ground that "all is not lost," to quote the song of a contemporary rock band.

The above intuitions were sharpened by the writings of Michel de Certeau (1925-1986). He was a French thinker who could not be located in one field because his scholarly interest covers many fields – philosophy, history, social sciences, psychoanalysis, among others. What caught my attention in de

[12] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 125; See also D. F. Pilario, "Politics of Culture and the Project of Inculturation," *Jahrbuch für kontextuelle Theologien* 1999 (Frankfurt, Main: IKO - Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1999), 172-94.

[13] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature,* 113.

Certeau's framework is his emphasis on the "ordinary", the everyday, the quotidian. In the tradition of Wittgenstein whose project was "to bring back words from their metaphysical to everyday use," de Certeau privileges the "walkers" over the "voyeur".[14] The voyeur sees things from a distance, from a detached but totalizing perspective of power. The walker's location, however, is a view of the *Wandersmänner,* a perspective from below, always tentative, provisional and fragmentary. Against the strategic gaze of power by the voyeur, the weak is only capable of "tactics". Everyday practices are also tactics: "Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping and cooking" are ordinary activities but they also contain within them clever tricks that invert, divert or subvert dominant discourses. A kindred author, James Scott, calls them "weapons of the weak".[15] I am to realize that it is not only the truly honest struggles but also the practical and cunning intelligence that is important as demonstrated by my neighbors in Hagdan who have consistently survived, diverted or subverted the violence of colonization, local power elites and the global power of capital that dominates the world in our times. I can still remember the stories of my old grandmother who prides herself in misleading the invading Japanese soldiers to another route so that they could not pass by the place where her neighbors were hiding. Forty years after, I could still feel her anger as she was telling the story. She could not accept that they stole her chicken – the only source of their livelihood! These and many other stories of everyday resistance brings to life these philosophical theories.

Pierre Bourdieu gave this dual view of reality a name which is easy to remember: the *double-vérité* of practice.[16] The French

[14] M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 92-93. For a summary account of De Certeau's project, see D. F. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis,* 84-87.

[15] James Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[16] Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Standford, California: Standford University Press, 1998) 120, For the application of Bourdieu's notion of double-vérité into theology, see D. F. Pilario, "Gift-Exchange in Sacramentology: A Critical Assessment from the Perspective

thinker, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), is mainly a sociologist but has traversed to other disciplinary fields like philosophy, anthropology, media, education, and others.[17] I first encountered Bourdieu's notion of the dual truth of all practices when I was reading about the phenomenon of gift-exchange. Beyond the structuralist research of Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss, Bourdieu argues that the gift is both an act of generosity and an act of strategic relations. It possesses a double truth – of gratuitousness and power, of liberality and symbolic violence, of interestedness and disinterestedness. This in fact is the logic of practice, of all practices.

In the Philippines, this research direction is taken by historiographers like Reynaldo Ileto, Vicente Rafael and others who started to write "history from below".[18] Their studies on

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of Pierre Bourdieu," *Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy* 82 (2001): 80-96; reprinted in *Contemporary Sacramental Contours of a God Incarnate*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Lambert Leijssen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 85-101; "Das Evangelisierungswerk auf den Philippinen während der Kolonialzeit. Die missionarischen Methoden und ihre Ambivalenz," in *Evangelisierung: Die Freude des Evangeliums miteinander teilen.* Edited by Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2015), 40-65, translated as "Revisiting Evangelization Work in Colonial Philippines: The Ambivalence of Missionary Methods." *Evangelization: Sharing the Joy of the Gospel.* (Quezon City; Claretian Publications, 2016) 19-38.

[17] For Pierre Bourdieu's main methodological works, see *Outline of the Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); *The Logic of Practice,* trans. R. Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990; *In Other Words: Essays Towards Reflexive Sociology,* trans. M. Adamson (London: Polity Press, 1990); *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); *Language and Symbolic Power,* ed., J. Thompson and trans. G. Raymond and M Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[18] Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979); Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Conversion in Tagalog Society under the Early Spanish Rule* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press). For the role of this school in Asian Christian historiography, see D. F Pilario, "Revisiting Historiographies: New

Filipino practices reveal this *double-vérité*. We mention one example nearer to home, i.e., the recitation of the *Pasyon.*[19] Ileto's research on the Catholics' chanting of the *Pasyon* in small chapels and houses, far from the liturgical impositions of the Church, means two things. To the colonial eye, the *Pasyon* is a formation toward obedience to God's will most often represented by the will of the colonial master. In other words, just as Jesus was silently led to the slaughter without a word of protest, so should the colonialized carry the colonial yoke without complaint for this is how God wants things to be. However, to the view of the colonial subject, the *Pasyon* was a source of hope for a new social order, one that has been inaugurated by Jesus' death and resurrection. As they dutifully chant its verses every year, revolutionary groups were given the hint that a different world was possible. The *Pasyon* thus possessed a *double-vérité*. It is an overt instrument of domination that can transform itself into an act of resistance. In their honest desire to survive in freedom, they piously chanted the *Pasyon*; and its surplus value effectively ushered them to new horizons beyond the colonial world.

In all these explorations, there was one guide who was continuously challenging me to keep an open eye and mind during this whole enterprise: my mentor, Georges De Schrijver.[20] He became my all-present ally and real dialogue-partner. I consulted him at every turn of my journey. And it is a rare privilege to converse with him on the developing ideas of his ongoing researches. The interdisciplinary journey that I trod also finds a parallel echo in his own work. His *oeuvre* traverses multiple

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Directions," In *Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed., Felix Wilfred (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 539-557.

[19] The *Pasyon* (a word derived from the 'Passion' of Jesus Christ) is an extended verse form of the whole biblical narrative from the creation of the world in Genesis to the last judgment in the Book of Revelation. This popularized narrative account of salvation history, filled with local idioms, images and metaphors, is chanted in local popular tunes by neighborhood groups in individual houses during the Holy Week even to this day.

[20] Georges De Schrijver, *Liberation Theologies in Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

disciplines, e.g., philosophy, sociology, esthetics, science and theology. His classes could start with Plato and ends in quantum physics in his attempt to search for the creator God. He could also write about Balthazar's aesthetics, Lyotard's postmodern ethics or Derrida's deconstruction to end with a passionate concern for poor Basic Christian communities in the Two Thirds World. I can still recall the first time I approached him for consultation on my first thesis topic. I was still two months in Leuven. I was then thinking of writing about the Trinity and did some extensive research about it for more than a month. I composed a short proposal and an extensive bibliography as I prepared to meet him for the first time. After skimming through, he right away rejected the paper on which I slept sleepless nights. After some little conversation about what I really wanted, he endorsed three authors to read – Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. To my surprise, I later on found out that they were all social thinkers; none of them talked about God, much less the Trinity. That started my long journey with critical theory.

But the more decisive influence in this theoretical trajectory is the life story of a very practical man by the name of Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). I came to know his face in a *stampita* at my grandmother's altar when I was a young boy. These *stampitas* were distributed by Vincentian missionaries during the popular missions they gave in Oslob long time ago. It was the same face that I met when I entered the Vincentian seminary decades later. His life spent among and for the poor formed my young mind in formation. In time, his words reverberated in my mind: "Let us love God my brothers, let us love God. But let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow;" "Ten times you go to the poor, ten times you will find God there;" "When you pray and the poor knocks at your door, go and leave God for God;" "The poor are your masters. You are the servant;" "Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity;" "The poor people who do not know where to go and what to do, they are suffering and their numbers increase every day — these are my

burden and my sorrow."[21] It was not so much theory as praxis. Or, better still, a way of thinking about God's love in an affective and effective praxis among the poor and the excluded.[22]

As you have seen in this neat narrative, my earlier readings could not be located within the theological field. I was often asked: "Are you really doing theology? What is theological in your discourse? Are you not more of a sociologist or philosopher than a theologian?" It is the same question I have posed to my mentor from the very beginning. My reading list were all philosophers, literary critics and social theorists. How do I bring them to bear on theology? He often jokingly replies: "Philosophy, sociology and theology – they are all the same." In my attempt to make sense of this remark, I began to realize this: their subject matters maybe different but their disciplinary methods are parallel. I also began to understand that, because of these circumstances, I have located myself in the field of fundamental theology, in the intersection of these disciplines where a viable theological method is continually shaped and put into question. This brings me to my next keyword.

METHOD(S)

The scientist, Rupert Sheldrake, says: "Science at its best is an open-minded method of inquiry, not a belief system."[23] The

[21] For a good biography, see Jose Maria Roman, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography* trans., Joyce Howard (London: Melisende, 1999).

[22] For reflections on Vincentian themes, see D. F. Pilario, *Knowing the Tree by its Leaves: Re-reading Vincent de Paul in the Philippine Context* (Manila: Congregation of the Mission, 1994); "Inculturating Congregational Charisms: A Methodological Proposal for the Vincentian Family," *Hapag: An Interdisciplinary Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (2005) 169-207; "Vincent de Paul and the Court: Responding to the Politics of Power," *Vincentiana* 52 (July-August 2008): 294-314; "One-Hundred Fifty Years of Service to the Philippine Church." In *One-hundred Fifty years of Vincentian Presence in the Philippines* (1862-2012) *Hapag: An Interdisciplinary Theological Journal* 9, no 2 (2012) 5-28.

[23] Rupert Sheldrake, "Why Bad Science is Like Bad Religion," accessed September 22 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rupert-sheldrake/why-bad-science-is-like-bad-religion_b_2200597.html.

irony is that theology has always been a "science" of a belief system. Thus, there has been, a debate in theological history between "*credo ut intelligam*" (I believe in order to understand) and "*intelligo ut credam*" (I understand in order to believe). St. Anselm favored the former; it made him formulate the now classic definition of theology as *"fides quaerens intellectum*." Roger Bacon preferred the later; and was imprisoned for it in an indefinite period of time. In whichever way one interprets it, all theologians, worthy of the name, needed to deal with scientific method. Think of Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, Question 1, article 2: "Whether sacred doctrine is a science?" The answer as we know is in the affirmative. Think of Karl Rahner and his use of the notion of "supernatural existential" in order to explain the universal structure of human knowing, human existence and, consequently, the possibility of God. Method affords the practitioner an instrument of accountability and reflexive control in the interpretation of one's data. Without methodological control (in democratic political governance, they call it "checks and balance"), the theologian can become an autocrat who can wield the power to interpret as s/he wishes. No sooner will s/he dangerously think that s/he is the representative of the gods. As the American scientist and inventor, Edwin Land, writes: "Science is a method to keep yourself from kidding yourself."[24]

I will first contextualize my discussion on method vis-à-vis my two interlocutors in theological methodology, Clodovis Boff and John Milbank. Both are landmark authors on method in two popular theological currents in our times – liberation theology and radical orthodoxy – the former modern, the latter postmodern. Both attempt to employ *praxis* in their theological methodology. Milbank's postmodern framework denies its usefulness in theology; Boff's modern theological structure "situates" it. I worked out my preferred theological method in polemics with them.

[24] Cited in *QFinance: The Ultimate Resource* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).

John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* (1990)[25] served as the programmatic method for a popular movement of young Western theologians who called their group "Radical Orthodoxy". While I was studying in Leuven, their theological production – mostly with Routledge – were already voluminous, their positions daring, and their assertions adventurous. I sat in one or two of Milbank's lectures. His words were quite scholarly and erudite, but which, in truth, I do not quite understand. I can cursorily summarize Milbank's theological method in three areas: the rejection of modern secular reason because it usurps the place of *civitas Dei*; the rejection of any secular social theory because theology is "the" social theory; and the rejection of metaphysical violence in postmodern thought. He retrieved Augustine's City of God to serve as the new Christendom. I have spent long polemics with Milbank elsewhere and we have neither time nor space to discuss them here. Suffice it to say, that his theological method is a last ditch and hopeless attempt to take back the crown of the "queen of sciences" at a time when no more queens exist or, if they do, have already become ceremonial trappings.

Clodovis Boff's classic work entitled *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (1978)[26] still holds the name of the most extensive methodological work in liberation theology. First written in French as a dissertation in the Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium, it aimed at defending liberation theology from the incursions of ideologies which at that time was the problem that the Latin American church was facing. By using Louis Althusser's[27] framework of scientific production as model for theological production, the product of socio-analytic mediation (Generality I) becomes the "raw material" that will be processed in a further step.

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[25] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993 [1990]); *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). For my discussion of Milbank, see *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis,* 329-383.

[26] Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations,* trans., R. Barr Maryknoll (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). For my discussion of Boff, see *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis,* 277-329.

[27] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1996).

The hermeneutic mediation (Generality II) which consists of "Christian positivity" containing the Church's revealed truths will serve as the "light" to transform the previous raw material into a new finished theological product (Generality III). In this manner, histories, contexts, ideologies or praxis only enter into the theological process as "raw materials" of the theological knowledge production. The theologian's location, the lived experience of communities or the praxis of people on the ground are mere "external determinants" of theology. They have nothing to do with the theology's internal epistemological process. Ironically, the voices of excluded are again disenfranchised by a theology which intended to liberate them in the first place.

SEE-JUDGE-ACT

Beyond Milbank and Boff, I follow the familiar method of "see-judge-act," once famous among Young Christian Workers and Catholic Action groups.[28] There is not much need to elaborate this framework since it has been adopted by the Church's official teaching in *Mater et Magistra* and subsequent encyclicals (it only reached an eclipse during the time of Benedict XVI to be later resurrected by Pope Francis), as the methodology of the Catholic Social Teachings. It has even been adopted as the basic process of Basic Christian communities at the grassroots. As mentioned, Clodovis Boff constructed a complex theological edifice for liberation theology out of this simple process. The question left for me to answer is: How do the thoughts of my allies and dialogue partners come into play within this preferred theological method? Let me mention some points.

[28] For my discussion on see-judge-act methodology, see *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis*, 536-559; see also "Revisiting See-Judge-Act: Reflections from Asia," *Journeys of Liberation: Joys and Hopes for the Future,* eds., Maria Clara Bingemer and Luiz Carlos Susin, *Concilium* 2016/1 (London: SCM Press, 2016), 83-92. For its application to the social teaching of the Church, see D. F. Pilario, ed., *Faith in Action: Catholic Social Teaching on the Ground* (Manila: Adamson University, 2016).

See. Theology starts with human experience. There is a need to analyze the social situation first, and from there reflect on what God wants of us in our context. "Theology is only a second act," says Gustavo Gutierrez, "the first act of which is praxis."[29] In the context of classical liberation theology, socio-analytic mediation has always been equated with Marxist social analysis which caught the Vatican's attention and which prodded it to issue stern warnings in 1984. It was a difficult time for liberation theologians, but only to be relaxed later at Pope Francis' time when Gustavo Gutierrez was again welcomed to the Vatican and Oscar Romero was beatified as a martyr of the faith.

Beyond Roman church politics, socio-analytical methods also underwent "pluralization" in subsequent decades. New plural contexts asserted themselves as worthy of consideration, e.g., gender, race, indigenous peoples, and religions. Socio-economic analysis turned to "culture". Telic notions of grim and determined *praxis* turned into appreciating the value of "*la vida cotidiana*" and the values of community living, taking cues from Michel de Certeau in cultural studies, Alasdair McIntrye in philosophy, Erving Goffman in sociology, myriad of feminist theorists, and the resurgence of religious traditions and indigenous spiritualities in the postmodern world. These pluralist analytic views help theology in the more accurate reading the signs of the times through recovery of the voices which were suppressed in the previous hegemonic rule of hard economic analysis based on class.

Yet, in another turn, global capital has now intruded mercilessly into the inner fabric of grassroots communities making these vulnerable voices the new grist in the mill of this powerful economic machine. Economic globalization, this "economy that kills" real peoples in the name of profit – to borrow the terms of Pope Francis – needs a new critique against the "idolatry of money" and the "throw away culture" that is its consequence.[30] It is here

[29] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1977).

[30] For a parallel analysis in liberation theology, see Jung Mo Sung, "The Poor After Liberation Theology," in *Globalization and the Church of*

that Raymond Williams comes in handy. In highly global capitalistic world as ours, "culture" itself has been coopted by hegemonic capital. Williams' Marxist sensibilities bring us to the dual-truth of all practices: they are both effects of domination and acts of resistance. And following Gramsci's analysis of hegemonies of present capitalist societies, there will always be the counter-hegemonic moment that comes from the oblique resistance of dominated voices from the peripheries of power. Such acute sensibility to power in reading the "signs of the times" will always be salutary for theology of our times.

Judge. This part of the theological method has always been top-down. The question traditionally asked in this part is "what does the Church say about our situation?" The word "to judge" (*juger* in French; *juzgar* in Spanish) always gives the impression of a view from above. From the manualist theologies of previous centuries to some magisterial pronouncements of recent memory, theological reflection has been a deductive process based on pre-established doctrines. The doctrine only needs application, or so this theological view asserts. Situation and context, no matter how complex they have become, do not in any way affect the doctrine at all. There is a belief that doctrines cannot change. Only their application changes as they encounter different cases.

This was concretely seen during the recent Synod on the Family. On the one hand, the bishops agreed that there is a need of a different type of theology that can learn from the difficult experiences on the families in our times. On the other hand, some bishops also say: "We never wished to change doctrine, only to change the application of the doctrines to particular cases. The doctrine cannot change."[31] I heard of a theology professor who, after listening to all the reflections and questions of his students, always ends with a question: "But what does the Church say?" For him, that is what matters, as if the church does not change at all.

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the Poor, eds. D. F. Pilario et al, *Concilium* 2015/3 (London: SCM Press, 2015), 65-74.

[31] "Letter No. 33, 2014," accessed 09.22.2014, http://insidethevatican.com/news/newsflash/letter-33-2014-francis-hand-tiller.

He did not even acknowledge that the students in front of him are also members of the said church.

From the perspective of our dialogue-partners, there is a need to institute "reflexivity" into the theological process. Just as the Scriptures and dogmas inform the Christian lives of the faithful, Christian principles also need to be enriched by people on the ground. Doctrines develop. Our understanding and reception of them do change, as Newman said long time ago. When it develops and grows, it also changes. *Dei Verbum* takes this up and stated that "the understanding of the things and words handed down grows, through the contemplation and study of believers… [which] tends continually towards the fullness of divine truth" (DV, 8). Let me add: through "the praxis of believers". Just as doctrines remind us of the parameters and limits of belief, so does the praxis and reflection of people on the ground put into question the parameters and limits of doctrine. It is only in this interaction that God's message of salvation be made concrete in the world.

Reflexivity has long gained currency in scientific discourses of our time. Albert Einstein already acknowledged it long time ago: "As far as laws of mathematics refer to reality," he says, "they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality."[32] Pierre Bourdieu thinks that our scientific knowledge production process is fraught with *illusio* emerging from three sources: personal social locations; our belonging to a specific field of specialization; and our being part of scholastic field itself. First, our belonging to a certain class, brings with it perspectives only common to those in our class. We are thus blind to the worldview of other classes. It is the same with gender, race or religion. Second, our belonging to a certain professional field also engenders certain *illusio* only common to a specific field. Economists always clash with cultural workers; their jargons and interests do not match. The first two levels are easy to check. One only needs a person from a different social location or another professional field to check the

[32] Albert Einstein, "Geometry and Experience," [Address to the Prussian Academy of Sciences, Berlin, 27 January 1921], accessed September 22, 2016, http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/Extras/Einstein.geom etry.html.

other's biases and illusions. Interdisciplinary exchanges encourage the surfacing of these prejudices, thus, leading to a more reliable knowledge production. Theology can employ its professional resources to critique the workings of politics; or economics can lay bare the illusions of the aesthetic field. This also means that theology needs to relinquish her crown of being able to say the "last word" vis-à-vis other disciplinary specializations. Even as it has its role to critique other fields and their assumptions, it also needs to learn that it is just one voice among the many other voices.

But the third kind of illusion is more difficult to deal with: our belongingness to the scientific-academic profession itself. People in this field do precious and necessary jobs. They think of formulas or construct theories but within the special world of *skholè* (from where "school" or "scholastic" comes). In this situation of leisure, people can discuss and debate about anything in the world without end but with no serious repercussions to reality. Their games are without real material and economic consequences. This intellectualist or theoreticist bias (also called by Bourdieu the "scholastic point of view") is most difficult to detect since professionals are always looked up to as providing solutions to the problems confronting the world. But the world of "science has a time which is not of practice," Bourdieu says.[33] In other words, if we want an honest knowledge production process, the world of practice, the rough grounds, should be able to critique the world of science. Or, following another thinker Gaston Bachelard, if "the world in which one thinks is not the world in which one lives",[34] our way of living should have a say in our way of thinking, not just the other way around.

Applying this to theology, reflexivity refers to the position of the theologian in the whole knowledge production process. In order to avoid the illusion of omnipotence or omniscience where the theologian thinks that the "revolution in the order of words" is

[33] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* 81. For a summary of this discussion, see *Back to the Rough Grounds,* 204-230.

[34] Cited in P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (London: Polity Press, 2000), 51

celebrated as a "revolution in the order of things",[35] the theologian should relinquish speaking the 'last word". This place should be given to the people on the ground whose voices s/he can only try so much to fully appropriate but could not. Or, better, this "last word" should be given to the Totally Other, the Word, whose message s/he tries so much to discern. This means a double immersion, i.e., in the lives of grassroots communities and in the world of the Spirit. The theological stance is always to listen, to check if one's voice is faithful to theirs. In short, this means being reflexive. For science can never fully appropriate the time of practice. This stance is called with different names, e.g., theological modesty, humility, reflexivity.[36]

More concretely, contemporary reflection emphasizes that proclamations of theology – knowledge born out of *skholè* – needs to depend on the *sensus fidelium*. The recent ITC document *Sensus fidei* writes: "Theology should strive to detect the word which is growing like a seed in the earth of the lives of the people of God, and, having determined that a particular accent, desire or attitude does indeed come from the Spirit, and so corresponds to the *sensus fidelium*, it should integrate it into its research" (SF, 82). Beyond this official recommendation, there should be structures of feedback and communication, decision-making and accountability where all the faithful, especially those coming from grassroots communities, have continuing access for their voices to be effectively heard. Without these socio-political forms, this is all pious pronouncements.

In my opinion, this is where the theological method of our friends – Milbank and Boff – failed in many respects.[37] John Milbank is known to be non-reflexive on three grounds. He disregards social locations and the socio-economic conditions of possibility of the ideas he uses. He dismisses other scientific fields (philosophy, economics, sociology and politics) and asserted that theology alone suffices. There is no need of social theory, he argues.

[35] Ibid., 2.

[36] For my discussion of theological reflexivity, see *Back to the Rough Grounds,* 213-227; 457-471.

[37] Ibid., 458-462.

Theology is itself a social theory. Milbank, the theologian becomes the "omniscient narrator" of theological knowledge debunking all others as flawed and inadequate. Clodovis Boff is better in this realm. He acknowledges the social location of his theological enterprise. His position is colored by the struggles of Latin American Christians in the context of poverty and oppression. He also respects the autonomy of social sciences as his dialogue-partners. However, Boff's uncritical use of structuralist Althusserianism shields theological theory off from people's praxis. In his earnest defense of theology from the influence of ideologies, prevalent in the Latin America of his times, he also disqualifies the voices of the poor whom liberation theology intends to liberate in the first place. The theologian and his/her method should acknowledge that his theorizing cannot fully account the complexity of the people's experiences. To borrow his own terms, theological theory can only *asymptotically* approximate the Real.

Act. Pastoral planning reaches its peak after Vatican II. After reading the signs of the times, church communities committed themselves to institute strategic goals, plan lines of action, or determine performance indicators. Gantt charts, vision-mission-goals, short-term and long-term objectives became the bywords of parish planning weekends. Dioceses, parishes and religious congregations employ planning experts and corporate gurus to assist them in this task. This is quite an advance from pious religious activities and dole-out approaches which were once permanent fixtures of parish programs. In recent times, however, there proliferate cases of over-planning by detached pastoral experts without any relation to the problems of excluded peoples. These pastoral planners are acting like generals of defeated armies who are planning a war from their armchair without connection to reality, to borrow an image from Pope Francis. Moreover, they are unaware that this same development planning strategies obey the same logic of the corporate fields from which they emerge, and are also responsible for the marginalization and exclusion of grassroots communities, our churches profess to deliver liberating pastoral care.

From the perspective of our dialogue-partners, let me forward the revolutionary dimension of everyday practices. We do

not intend to denigrate the need for formal planning in pastoral programs. We only need to warn people of its inadequacy and excesses. But beyond them, we bring out the value of everyday practices in the life of ordinary faithful – be it in religious or political sphere. Following Williams, Bourdieu and de Certeau, these ordinary practices (like cooking, praying, walking or dancing) are also acts of liberating resistance. These ordinary practices like those of popular religions among the grassroots, mostly outside the formal organization of the center, are the most accessible to people on the rough ground. It is also these practices that resist the onslaught of hegemonic power – economic, political and religious – in their everyday lives.

I am thinking, for instance, of the victims of extreme calamities trying their best to survive after a flood or a storm by planting rice or vegetables even as the stench of decaying bodies still fill the surroundings. I am thinking of indigenous peoples doing their rituals as they invoke the gods to help them in front of militarized guards of a multinational mining company. I am thinking of an old mother lighting her candle in front of the image of Mary as she prays for her daughter being executed in a faraway country, victimized as she was by international drug syndicates. These excluded peoples do not know of social analysis, nor have they time to go to rallies and demonstrations or attend parish planning assemblies. Yet the ordinary activities that punctuate their everyday lives also become revolutionary actions that make them survive natural disasters, colonial regimes, local warlords and the devastating effects of the contemporary globalization. The resilience and creativity of the people on the ground as shown in their everyday practices – religio-cultural, indigenous and local – should be considered by theology as a fertile *locus theologicus*. This is so because God also shows his liberating power in the struggles and cries of the poor.

In all of the three steps, the challenge hurled to theological enterprise is to bring theology "back to the rough ground".[38]

[38] Parallel reflections along the same theological direction in different themes and fields can be found in the following articles. See, among others, D. F. Pilario, "Back to the Rough Grounds: Locating Resistance in

Wittgenstein was actually referring to the crystalline purity of logical universes. Reacting to the previous position on language he espoused in the *Tractatus*, he later argued that the world of logical perfect language which easily lends itself to perfect analysis, in fact, excludes the uncertainties and ambiguities of ordinary language in everyday speech. In short, since there is no fiction in the world of linguistic logic, there is also no movement possible, making the analysis useless and ineffective. This is the same direction we find in Bourdieu: the world of science is different from the world of practice. The world in which we think is not the same as the world in which we live. Remembering the image of Michel de Certeau, unlike the "walker", the view of the "voyeur" is a detached view; he does not experience the heat of the moment of actual practice. "So back to the rough ground."

Times of Globalization," *Post-colonial Europe in the Crucible of Cultures: Reckoning with God in a World of Conflicts*, eds., Jacques Haers, Norbert Hintersteiner and Georges de Schrijver (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), 21-52; "Back to the Rough Grounds: Interreligious Dialogue beyond the Classical Paradigms," *Asian Christian Review* 5, No. 2 (2011): 10-29; "Attempts by Asian Theologians to Evolve a Viable Theory of Religious Pluralism and Dialogue for our Times." *Bogoslovni vestnik* 71 (2011): 327 – 344; "Catholic Social Movements in the Philippines: Clashes with Institutional Powers," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 10, No. 2 (2013): 1-17; "Restorative Justice amidst Continuing Violence," in *Reconciliation: Empowering Grace*, eds. Jacques Haers, Felix Wilfred, Kristien Justaert and Yves de Maesener. Concilium 49. 2013/1 (London, SCM Press, 2013), 64-73; "Jesus of Nazareth, Mystic and Prophet: A View from the Rough Grounds," *Towards an Integral Vision for the Future of Religious Life: New Insights on the Mystical and Prophetic Elements, Religious Life Asia* XVI (2014): 49-67; "Jesus in PCP II, Jesus of the Margins." *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines: Quo vadis?* eds. Eric Genilo and Agnes Brazal. SVST Interdisciplinary Series (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 27-54; "Religious Freedom in Defense of the Margins: Lessons from *Dignitatis Humanae*," in *Religious Freedom. Foundations – Reflections – Models,* One World Theology Series, eds. Klaus Krär¬er and Klaus Vellguth (Quezon City Claretian Publications, 2014), 225-¿38.

Applying this to theological method, socio-analytical method (to see), as I have shown, does not present a straightjacket analysis of all cases. The methods of analysis also changes depending on the situation. It follows that the result of such analyses also varies. No one knows the final outcome until the analysis is brought down to the rough ground, to the "indissoluble material social process," to borrow the words of Raymond Williams. This stance places theology in a constant state of vigilance and reflexivity, not only with the changing signs of the times but also in the appropriateness and timeliness of its instruments.

The hermeneutic mediation (to judge) is challenged toward the same reflexive stance. Theologians – as pastors, teachers, academics, writers, community leaders, etc. – all belong to the world of the *skholè*. Regardless of our social location within the academic and pastoral fields, we find ourselves in the work of representing "the people". And the time of synthetic representation can never fully account the time of actual practice. The challenge to mitigate this distance between theory and practice points to the need of reflexivity in theology. We need to bring theology – its doctrines and dogmas – to the rough ground. They are not applicable everywhere, every time. In fact, their real meaning does not manifest outside their specific socio-historical contexts. If we cannot fully appropriate the Real, as Boff says, the Church – its leaders (pastors and magisterium) and its teachers (theologians) – should relinquish the "last word" which it has long sequestered from God and his people.

Even as we need to plan and project lines of actions in our communities, pastoral mediation (to act) also needs to same act of reflexivity. Since the people are already immersed in their own contexts, most often, they already know what they need to do. Their everyday practices possess a clue to the effective and revolutionary response to difficult situations. In short, from analysis to theological reflection and to pastoral action, the theological stance is to listen.

QUESTIONS

There is no conclusion to this trajectory. There shall never be one because the theologian does not possess the last word. Thus,

it may be good to end with questions; make attempts to answer them; and maybe adopt silence as our ultimate response. I have been always challenged by these two questions. First: why is the language too academic? How can people on the rough grounds understand? Second: why is there a proliferation of Western sources and dialogue partners? Why not use local resources?

I am well aware that my academic work will never be understandable to the communities which I am talking about. Our neighbors in Hagdan – *Benben* and *Inday Ana* – will never get to hear of Milbank or Bourdieu, of *praxis* or *poeisis*, of epistemology or social theory. Yet, from the start, this work has never been intended to teach them a lesson. On the contrary, it is an attempt on the part of the Church and theology to learn from their struggles and, at the same time, to bring their voices to the intellectual, to the academician, to those living in the *skholè* in a language which the scholastics can understand. Why is there a need to do this? Most often, it is the intellectual—in the field of philosophy, sociology, theology – who claims to speak on people's behalf. Sociological surveys, philosophical frameworks and theological theories all claim to 'authoritatively' interpret what 'the people' say, most often without acknowledgement of their limits. This method challenges these disciplines, at least in theology, to take account of its scientific parameters. In a Church which prides itself to be the 'Church of the poor', all the more is there a need for an adequate theological method which sees to it that the voice which it proclaims is not its own but those of the really voiceless or, better still, that of the God who reveals Himself or Herself in their silence. Theologies – back to the rough grounds!

The use of Western sources is also aimed at bringing to the Western mind in idioms and metaphors those which Westerners can 'best' understand as their own. Going back to the metaphor of a tour guide, what I am doing here is to try to explain to a foreign tourist what is happening in my local community. So, this work is for the tourist, as it were. The use of philosophical and sociological sources in this project is also an effort to subvert from within. This project also enlists the 'high' language of Western sciences, putting them in the service of justice, liberation and struggle for wellbeing, which constitute the very aspirations which these communities

from the 'underside' have always cherished and have long been working for. I think I have proven that the same colonial theoretical resources that help alienate the poor can be subverted to usher in the seeds of their own liberation. I believe that all theoretical resources regardless of provenance – local or foreign, national or international – when critically appropriated can be enlisted in the service of the transformation of theology, church and society. Outright denial of foreign sources because they are foreign, or a blind acceptance of local resources because they are local, does not help at all in every reflexive scientific theological engagement, especially in doing theology from the margins.

But when I talk to people in my neighborhood or to communities like them, I shift to a different language altogether – to a language which we all understand from childhood – the stories and the prayer, the jokes and the banter, the singing and dancing, the eating and drinking. Even as I am sometimes obliged to say something, what I say are those things that I have learned from them. In fact, in front of them, the theologian in me, can only bow down in silence as I contemplate on the hope that I feel amidst this people who have taught me about life, about struggles, about God. Max Warren's metaphor which I paraphrased below always serves a good reminder of reflexivity. I need to "take off my shoes, for the place I am approaching is holy. Else I may find myself treading on people's dreams. More serious still, I may forget that God was here before I arrived."[39]

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[39] Max Warren, "General Introduction," to A. K. Cragg, *Sandals at the Mosque: Christian Presence Amid Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 9-10.