

FOREWORD

One can, in a sense, interpret the history of theology as a history of interdisciplinary conversations. While the term “interdisciplinary conversations” would be clearly anachronistic, the reality may not be so. For theology, sensing divine action in human life and experiences in the world has always turned to sources of knowledge to make sense of the salvific and revelatory activity of God. These it regarded as conversation “partners” with whom to discuss vital issues and from whom to draw concepts, terminology, imagery and even a theoretical construct to organize the articulation of the Tradition. Biblical words had arisen from cultural traditions in which the local believing community had to live out its faith in Yahweh. Well known to us also is the longtime partner of Western theologizing, Greek philosophies, which collectively had been called an “ancilla.” So rooted were Western theologies in this philosophical form of thought that churches in the Third World, which inherited these formulations of the faith, had come to regard theology as necessarily philosophical as well. No doubt, the tandem of colonization and evangelization had largely contributed to this belief. But this had not remained unchallenged.

Paradigm shifts in thinking occurred both in society as well as in the Church. Terms like postmodernism, postcolonialism and globalization, which have become familiar in academic discourses, signal important changes in people’s mindsets. What were deemed absolute and immutable were questioned and critically assessed. Vatican II, a breakthrough in Catholic theological thought, provided a crucial crack in the otherwise dominant and dominating (hegemonic?) neo-scholastic way of theologizing.

There are different ways to interpret this significant change. One possible way of reading this situation comes from the philosopher-theologian, Bernard Lonergan. To him what we are witnessing is the ongoing shift in the perception of culture, understood as the totality of a group’s ever evolving way of thinking, feeling and acting in history. We are moving away from a classical way of apprehending culture to perceiving it in a more empirical manner. Among other things, this means that we no longer presume that there is but one overarching culture—that of the Western civilization—

but that there are many different cultures existing in our world. As a result, from a monolithic and univocal reading of the God-human relationship in theology, a pluriform and different articulations of it have emerged as local theologies. Today, context—initially construed in terms of time and space—has become a buzz word. Attention given to particular histories and specificities of cultures expanded to serious considerations of socio-economic and political locations in society as well as of gender orientation and religious persuasion. This trend continues in a vibrant manner within the theological enterprise in the Philippines.

Explicitly focusing on recent developments in local theologizing, the 2nd annual conference of the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines, DAKATEO (*Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya*), held on October 2005 in Tagaytay City, explored the theme “Theological Interdisciplinary Conversations in Post-colonial and Global Contexts.” Six of the seven papers published in this collection were read during the conference itself, while the seventh was presented in a special session of DAKATEO.

The first two contributions may be seen as a call to theology to be more attentive to contemporary human experience. Daniel Franklin Pilario’s article, “Mapping Postcolonial Theory: Appropriations in Contemporary Theology,” highlights what postcolonial discourse does to and for theology. “The postcolonial project,” he says, “is an effort at ‘historicizing’ theological discourse by pulling it back to the ‘rough grounds’ – to its socio-economic, political and historical location.” In this way it prevents theology from being hegemonic. Ferdinand Dagmang’s paper on “Identities Amidst Connections and Disconnections” alerts theologians to the persistence of alienation in society today, in general, and to the dangers arising from “structures and various adjustments within capitalism,” in particular. He hopes that “adequate attention to the social and cultural determinants of human consciousness and behavior” will “contribute to better ethical methodology.”

The second two articles in the collection point to suggested methodologies which may be useful in the new theological situation. In “Globalization and Historical Methodology,” Fabio Baggio assesses how the modern phenomenon of globalization influences historical methodology, particularly in the field of Church History.

He identifies both the advantages and the perils of a “globalized historical approach.” José de Mesa’s “*Pandaraya* as Sin: A Contextual Interpretation” takes as his starting point the widespread corruption in the Philippines and relates this to the Christian understanding of sin. Within the framework of the mutually interacting poles of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition and cultural experience, he employs a local cultural concept to provide a local interpretation of sin guided by “constant theological elements” discerned in various contextual theologies.

The last two articles of the conference, which recommend dialogue, illustrate a trend in contemporary theologizing, namely, a discerning reception of official Church pronouncements rather than unquestioning acceptance. From the vantage point of present-day experience, Lode Wostyn and Jimmy Belita pose critical questions on Vatican theology. Lode Wostyn’s “A Dictatorship of Relativism?: Roger Haight’s Encounter with the CDF” stresses the need for Church authorities to dialogue with the world. After pointing out how Haight’s theology can be an example of a fruitful dialogue with postmodernism, he criticizes the CDF’s “dictatorship of absolutism” and its abandonment of dialogue with the world of today. Jimmy Belita, in “When Sin Defines a Church: Towards a *Kenosis* Ecclesiology in Post-Colonial Age,” examines John Paul’s “Memory and Reconciliation” to propose a type of ecclesiology relevant to the postcolonial experience in the Third World. Arguing for the importance of “pursuing the historical truth” that could purify the Church of its guilt and responsibility in the colonial process, he says that a Church truly penitent needs to dialogue with its victims to achieve catharsis and healing.

A guest article by Georges De Schrijver in the collection examines the Enlightenment with its democratic legacy as an “unfinished project” in the hope that it offers “some important resources for overcoming the tragic effects of colonialism.” In “European Colonialism and the Legacy of the Enlightenment,” he explains why blame for colonialism which occurred and brought suffering to the Third World must be brought to the door of global capitalism rather than of the European Enlightenment itself.

José M. de Mesa
President, DAKATEO