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MISSIO SPIRITUS: A PNEUMATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR *MISSIO DEI*

By Luther Jeremiah Oconer, Ph.D.

Introduction

On August 27, 2000, Camias United Methodist Church, a small church in the town of San Simon in the Philippines, where I have served as pastor for three years, began work in what would later become its first daughter church in the barrio (rural village) of San Isidro about three miles away. The birth of this church was unexpected. Just a few months before, the church launched an aggressive campaign in the neighboring barrio of San Nicolas. We conducted a three-night evangelistic meeting at the village basketball court in conjunction with a medical and dental mission during the day. This resulted in a bible study among three unchurched families who welcomed our efforts.

Every Sunday afternoon, we would transport a big contingent of members, including young people, motivated to establish a church there. Unfortunately, as months went by, we have made very little progress. In contrast, the work in San Isidro, to our surprise, prospered. Through the initiative of one of our members, who also happened to be the chief social worker of the town, we began conducting Bible studies in the home of an unchurched Methodist family with whom she came into contact. Before we knew it, we were holding regular Sunday services along with nine other unchurched Roman Catholic families. Since then, I have recently discovered that the small worshiping congregation was recognized as a local church in 2006. In 2010, they dedicated their new church building and christened it Agape United Methodist Church. There are now more than a hundred United Methodists who worship there.

The case of the San Isidro mission illustrates the typical way by which Methodism in the Philippines had grown for much of its history since it was

established by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1899.¹ Filipino Methodists understood *mission* to mean that they are to reach out to the next barrio with the gospel of Christ. The pattern has always been the same: they reach out to friends, relatives, or a willing audience in a neighboring barrio, begin Bible studies and children's ministries, establish a worshipping congregation, and, ultimately, build a church building.

Perhaps you are wondering what does mission work in the Philippines has to do with missions in this post-Christian America? I believe the story of San Isidro brings to fore a much deeper lesson that applies to any cultural context or setting. Mission, as the term *missio Dei* suggests, is the mission of the Triune God, and the primary agent of the Trinity for this mission is the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*) who works to reconcile "all of creation to the Father through the Son."² Despite our best efforts and the resources we have invested in the San Nicolas mission, the soil was simply not fertile enough to plant a church. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit was actively moving in San Isidro, preparing the hearts of the first family and their neighbors until it was time for us to go to them.

In retrospect, I remember remarking how our work in San Isidro felt effortless compared to that of the San Nicolas mission. I realized that the Holy Spirit was already at work even before we came to San Isidro. We were simply participating in what the Holy Spirit was already doing. Since the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of mission, I, therefore, recommend that if we are going to contemplate on the *missio Dei*, we need to frame it through a robust understanding of the *missio Spiritus* (mission of the Spirit).³ For this task, let us closely examine the second chapter of the Book of the Acts, a text which marks not only the birth of the church but also the beginning of Christian missions. I will first quickly exegete the text and then highlight four essential lessons we can draw from Pentecost, which will help inform how we should rethink the *missio Dei* towards a faithful Methodist witness today.

¹ For more on the history of Methodism in the Philippines, see Luther J. Oconer, *Spirit-Filled Protestantism: Holiness-Pentecostal Revivals and the Making of Filipino Methodist Identity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017).

² Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 185. For a comprehensive treatment on this, see Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

³ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 185. See also, Amos Yong, "Primed for the Spirit: Creation, Redemption and the *Missio Spiritus*," *International Review of Mission* 100, no. 2 (2011): 355-66.

Acts 2:1–4

Luke describes the coming of the Holy Spirit in the second chapter of Acts, in verses 1-4.⁴ In the first verse, Luke quickly summarizes three crucial facts about the event. First, he marks the day by indicating that this occurred on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is the Greek name for the annual Jewish festival that marks the 50th day after the first Sunday of Passover. It was a time in the year when Jewish pilgrims, including Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora, would offer their firstfruits at the temple in Jerusalem. Second, Luke tells us who was there. He indicates “all” or, as we will find in Acts 1, about 120 disciples (1:15), including women, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers (1:14). Third, Luke provides some clue as to the location of the event by indicating “they were all together in one place.” We are not sure if this was the same upper room of the Last Supper. Luke, nevertheless, reveals that the disciples gathered in “the room upstairs” (1:13).⁵ Regardless of the precise location, what matters most is that they were all gathered in one place. As they prayed and waited, the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Luke further highlights three tangible signs that accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit: first, the sign of the “sound like the rush of a violent wind” (2:2); second, the sign of the “divided tongues, as of fire” (2:3); and third, the infilling of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues (2:4). As the disciples were filled with the Spirit with the accompanying signs, it is not hard to imagine why they caught the attention of the multitudes of people who were there for the festival. “Amazed and perplexed” by what they have witnessed, they began asking, “what does this mean?” It is worth noting that the witnesses did not merely marvel at the outward manifestations but also asked a theological question. Nonetheless, not all of them were convinced by the phenomena. Some even dismissed the authenticity of what was happening that they ridiculed the disciples for being drunk (2:12). I recommend that we take the posture of the first group of witnesses and, just like them, may we begin to ask, “what does this mean?” What does Pentecost tell us about the mission of the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*)? Acts 2:1–4 reveals to us lessons that I will outline in the next four sections.

***Missio Spiritus* is Supernatural**

First, Pentecost highlights the supernatural nature of missions. In Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8, Jesus describes the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost

⁴ Unless noted otherwise, all scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁵ See, for example, F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 51; Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 131–32.

like that of receiving “power” (in Greek: *dynamis*). True to Jesus’ promise, the Holy Spirit emboldened them. They were no longer huddled in the upper room but have instead exposed themselves to either the wonder or contempt of the crowd by declaring “God’s deeds of power” to them (2:11). Hence, we need to acknowledge that when the disciples spoke in tongues, it was a sign bearing witness to the power that they have received. Coming from the Galilean region, where people were known for being uncultured and swallowing syllables when speaking, they suddenly spoke in languages they did not learn.⁶ What the disciples experienced that day was symbolic of the mission that God was about to give them, a mission that would be accompanied by signs and wonders. Because of this demonstration of power, a crowd gathered around them, which inadvertently gave Peter a captive audience for his first sermon. Revival followed—as Luke further notes in Acts 2, there was a deep conviction of sin among them (37), and about 3,000 persons were baptized that day (41).⁷ But this was only the beginning. The apostles further manifested this power in the days following Pentecost. In Acts 3, we find Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple gate (1-10). In Acts 5, Luke confirms, “many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles” (12). As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by (14). Other miracles followed them throughout Acts. There was deliverance from evil spirits, visions, healings, and miraculous escapes from death. As we can see, what the early church experienced in Acts echoed Jesus’ supernatural-filled ministry as recorded in the gospels.

Pentecost reminds us then that we can never have a mission that is void of power. Mission that does not demonstrate the power of God to an unbelieving world cannot be sustained. If mission is the work of the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*), it will naturally have to make room for the miraculous. This understanding was not lost among early Methodists in the British Isles and North America. For example, John Wesley’s journal entries at the onset of the Methodist revival and onwards are full of accounts on the supernatural, including miraculous healings. He fervently defended them when Bishop William Warburton, the bishop of Gloucester, launched his diatribe against Wesley and his followers, accusing them of fanaticism in his *The Doctrine of Grace* (1762), mainly for their affinity with the supernatural.⁸

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸ For an extensive study of the miraculous in British Methodism, see Robert Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous: John Wesley’s Idea of the Supernatural and the Identification of Methodists in the Eighteenth-Century* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2013).

The bishop charged that Wesley “laid claim to almost every apostolic gift” based on reading Wesley’s journal.⁹ In his defense, Wesley cited eight instances of the miraculous in his journal, all quoted by the bishop in his treatise, including the case of Thomas Meyrick, who was raised from the dead on December 20, 1742, to prove his point. “But what does all this prove? Not that I claim any gift above other men but only that I believe God now hears and answers prayer even beyond the ordinary course of nature,” Wesley maintained.¹⁰ He simply believed that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were also readily available for his time. Similarly, on the other side of the Atlantic, supernaturalism also became one of the hallmarks of Methodism as it expanded from the eastern seaboard to the frontier a few decades later. In his seminal book *Taking Heaven by Storm* (2001), historian John Wigger attests that the “quest for the supernatural in everyday life was the most distinctive characteristic of early American Methodism” and helped account for its phenomenal growth.¹¹

How then can we ensure that the United Methodist Church’s mission in the U. S. would not be void of power? Our churches must demonstrate God’s power not only through works of piety, mercy, and justice but also by serving as outposts for the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. We need to allow expressions of Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality to flourish in the churches without putting unnecessary restrictions or sanctions against those who promote them. We also need to create, with the active support of bishops, venues for training both clergy and laity in signs and wonders ministries. The Roman Catholic Church, especially in the Philippines, has done an excellent job allowing the Charismatic movement to flourish in its parishes through the work of the El Shaddai movement, Couples for Christ, and other Holy Spirit renewal groups which comprise about fifteen percent of the membership of the church.¹² Correspondingly, the United Methodist Church in the Philippines has increasingly become Charismatic as well. Although expressions of Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality have been met with much opposition and have resulted in different degrees of schisms in the past, Charismatic renewal has since become mainstream. For example, the Aldersgate Renewal Ministries (ARM) Philippines, through their annual Aldersgate conferences, have enjoyed the support

⁹ John Wesley, A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Gloucester [William Warburton] (1763), I.2, in *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, vol. 11 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 468. Hereafter, all citations taken from this edition shall be referred to as *Works*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I.6, 474.

¹¹ John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America*, Reprint edition (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 110.

¹² See Christl Kessler and Jürgen Rüländ, “Responses to Rapid Social Change: Populist Religion in the Philippines,” *Pacific Affairs* 79, no. 1 (2006): 73–96; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84–85.

of Philippine United Methodist bishops in the past two decades. In recent years other United Methodist Charismatic renewal conferences have emerged, like *Ablaze*, *Alab Sigla* (Rekindle Flame), and *Revive*. For instance, *Revive Conference*, which is a project of the Philippines Central Conference, attracts more than 10,000 United Methodists at the Philippines Sports Arena in Pasig City every four years and is held a week prior to the central conference session.¹³ But such is not the case for many American United Methodists even though the Charismatic renewal has exerted some influence among them in the past four decades. For example, the General Conference approved in 1976 the “Guidelines: The United Methodist Church and the Charismatic Renewal” for inclusion in the *Book of Resolutions*.¹⁴ Additionally, the *Book of Worship* (1992) includes two liturgies for “A Service of Healing.”¹⁵ While it is clear that the Charismatic renewal has already made some headway into American United Methodist culture, its overall impact on the denomination remains marginal to this day.

Missio Spiritus is Universal

Second, in addition to the supernatural character of *missio Spiritus* in the Pentecost story, we also need to highlight its recipients. The witnesses, who came from at least fifteen different regions or language groups, attested that “God’s deeds of power” were proclaimed to them in their native tongues (2:7–11). The multiplicity of languages represented at Pentecost clearly attests to the universality or catholicity of the mission of the Spirit—that Christ’s act of salvation on the cross is free grace available to all people, including Gentiles. This was one of the hallmarks of early Methodist preaching.¹⁶ It was their preaching of “free grace” that placed Methodist preachers in direct confrontation with those who advocated the Calvinistic doctrine of election, which teaches that before the world was created, God “predestined” or chose those who would be saved.¹⁷ Furthermore, the diversity of tongues at Pentecost clearly demonstrates that the Holy Spirit’s mission is intended for all humanity. It was for this reason that Peter reminded the crowd of the Prophet Joel’s prophecy: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh”

¹³ Oconer, *Spirit-Filled Protestantism*, 2–3.

¹⁴ See Resolution 8015, *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 683–96.

¹⁵ *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 613–623.

¹⁶ Jason E. Vickers, “American Methodism: A Theological Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14–15.

¹⁷ See Albert C. Outler, “Free Grace: An Introductory Comment,” in *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, *Works*, 3:542–43.

(2:17, Joel 2:28). Similarly, the belief in Spirit empowerment for all people has enabled Methodists to defy the social conventions of their time as they made the gospel accessible to all people. With their strong belief in the witness of the Holy Spirit and sanctification, Methodist gatherings became venues for the empowerment of uneducated lay folk, including women and African Americans, and enabled them to assume leadership roles and engage in public ministry.¹⁸ It was for the same reasons why Richard Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, attested his admiration for Methodism:

The Methodists were the first people that brought glad tidings to the coloured people. I feel thankful that ever I heard a Methodist preach. We are beholden to the Methodists, under God, for the light of the Gospel we enjoy; for all other denominations preached so high-flown that we were not able to comprehend their doctrine. Sure am I that reading sermons will never prove so beneficial to the coloured people as spiritual or extempore preaching. I am well convinced that the Methodist has proved beneficial to thousands and ten times thousands.¹⁹

So the disciples suddenly spoke “God’s deeds of power” in the language of the Gentiles. But we are not just referring to ethnicity here. We need to ask, who are the Gentiles today? They are the people around us or in proximity to us whose language is different from ours. Pentecost reminds us that God wants us to reach out to Gentiles and to declare the “God’s deeds of power” in their language. It means we recognize where they are and meet them where they are.

Unfortunately, we have a language problem. Our churches have become subcultures or enclaves that are unwilling to speak in tongues to new peoples. The language that we speak in our worship services had become so exclusive for our taste that outsiders or people from other cultures cannot understand what we are saying. While United Methodism in the U. S. is to be lauded for its increasing diversity, such diversity is still segregated diversity. We pride ourselves for our diverse membership, and yet many of our worship services are still segregated based on ethnicity or cultural differences. Given the presence of large immigrant populations in the U. S., we have a unique opportunity in our hands to address this. We need to capitalize on this not by creating separate African, Asian, and Latino immigrant United Methodist churches but by finding ways to establish more multicultural congregations. Even tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and Apple would put us to shame for their highly multicultural workforce, which plays a vital role in the robust stream of innovation in these companies.

¹⁸ See, for example, Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 48-79, 123-72.

¹⁹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (Philadelphia: Martin & Boden, Printers, 1833), 17. Cf. Vickers, “American Methodism,” 11.

But, again, this is not merely about diversity based on ethnicities. Much needs to be done in creating fellowships of believers who profess faith in Jesus that fully embrace and celebrate the diversity of the communities they belong to. Churches must learn to speak a multiplicity of tongues that are friendly to different age groups, socio-economic class, music or worship style sensibilities, and other preferences without watering down the gospel and compromising United Methodist doctrinal identity. I am aware that what I am suggesting runs counter to church growth theories which teach that for a church to grow, it must concentrate its energies only on one demographic in the population it is serving.²⁰ Nevertheless, such theories are hard to reconcile with the diversity of the Pentecost event in Acts 2. The multiplicity of languages present at Pentecost clearly echoes the eschatological vision in the Book of Revelation, describing the ingathering of peoples from different tribes and tongues united in their worship of Christ (7:9–10). This vision is further extended into the great wedding banquet where multitudes of people participate (19:6–9; 21:4). Such is deeply integral to the Wesleyan understanding of the Lord’s Supper, where the supper itself is seen as a foretaste of this heavenly banquet.²¹ This, therefore, drives the third lesson: The *missio Spiritus* at Pentecost points us to God’s eschatological vision.

Missio Spiritus and the New Heaven and New Earth

Amos Yong correctly argues that Pentecost “anticipates the scope of the kingdom of God” by mirroring the “eschatological character of the Spirit’s activity – which extends to the final creation, the new heaven and new earth.”²² The Spirit’s revelation at Pentecost is God’s reminder or “deposit,” to borrow from Paul, that assures us of a much bigger transformation that is to come (2 Cor. 5:5). Aside from a foretaste of the ingathering of peoples from different tribes and tongues united in their worship of Christ, this vision also includes the total renovation of the planet into a new heaven and new earth where God shall “wipe every tear from their eyes” and put an end to death, crying, mourning, and pain (Rev. 21:1–4). Wesley further interpreted this vision in his sermon “The New Creation” when he described:

As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for, or parting with, friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And, to crown all, there will be a

²⁰ See, for example, Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995). See Part 3.

²¹ See, for example, Hymn XCIX in John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord Supper* (Bristol, UK: Felix Farley, 1745), 86.

²² Quoted in Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, 280.

deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him.²³

If we are to participate in the mission of the Holy Spirit, we need to fully embrace God's blueprint of the new heaven and new earth. Since mission is God's mission (*missio Dei*), we need to ensure that our participation in the *missio Dei* brings into view God's ultimate plan for the world. Having a robust eschatology will, without a doubt, help us articulate our mission better. Currently, there is nothing in the 2016 *Book of Discipline* that connects our mission to this bigger vision. Notably, the beginning paragraph (§120) of the "Ministry of All Christians" section states that the "mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."²⁴ While the addition of the phrase "for the transformation of the world" during the 2008 General Conference is commendable for clarifying why we need to make disciples of Jesus Christ, it, however, raises a new question: What do we mean when we say, "transformation of the world"? The aforementioned section of the *Discipline*, unfortunately, does not provide an answer to this. This then only serves to illustrate why our understanding of mission has been, for the most part, short-sighted and subject to much tension between those who advocate for an individual-centered form of evangelism and those who are zealously passionate about social justice advocacies. I believe infusing our articulation of the *missio Dei* with a healthy dose of Wesleyan eschatology will help us address this problem. It will enable us to realize that these two emphases are not polar opposites but can, in fact, co-exist together. I will explain this later.

While eschatology has no influence on our understanding of missions, this is not the case for other faith traditions, though. For example, most evangelicals who subscribe to a dispensationalist premillennial view of the future tend to be more conversionist-oriented while barely speaking to social issues for our time. This dispensationalist premillennial view of the future posits that Christ's return will **precede** the biblical millennium, a thousand-year period of peace and righteousness preceding the final judgment (Rev. 20:4-6). But his coming will bring about the "rapture," which will save the righteous from an impending period of tribulation and subject those who are "left behind" to a period of extreme hardship under a world leader known as the Antichrist. After such period, Christ will return again and vanquish the Antichrist and Satan and usher in the millennium, which upon its end will bring forth the final judgment.²⁵ Such understanding has been the dominant

²³ John Wesley, Sermon 64, "The New Creation," § 18, in *Sermons II*, in *Works*, 2:510.

²⁴ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 93.

²⁵ For a detailed treatment on premillennialism, see Craig A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,

view in popular American evangelical culture, as demonstrated by the immensely popular *Left Behind* series of books and movies of the past decade.²⁶

Those who subscribe to this eschatology see a world that is getting worse and worse and therefore treat evangelism with utmost urgency. Since they see current world events as signs of the end times, they proceed to save as many souls as they can. Another implication of this bleak view of the future is the tendency to care less about the transformation of society. It is, therefore, not difficult to discern why those who subscribe to this view are not known for their socio-political advocacies. This is what happened to fundamentalists and most Holiness and Pentecostal believers, who, as a result of their embrace of dispensational premillennialism, along with their anti-modernist and separatist tendencies, began to retreat from the world in the early decades of the twentieth century.²⁷

On the other end of the spectrum are those who hold to a postmillennial view of eschatology. Postmillennials believe that Christ will return *after* the biblical millennium, directly opposite to the premillennial option, which positions Christ's return before it.²⁸ This found great support among American evangelicals during the late 19th and early 20th centuries on account of their optimism towards positive changes that were happening in American society that came as a result of their reform efforts. It was, therefore, their conviction that the millennium was drawing near and after it will follow the return of Christ.²⁹ However, such optimism for the coming biblical millennium proved to be short-lived as World War I forced many of them to turn to premillennialism.³⁰ But, in recent decades, postmillennialism has since made a comeback, albeit in modified forms. The rise of the DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation) 2000 movement well illustrates this development. DAWN 2000 was a mission strategy that found support from many evangelical groups, missionaries, missiologists, and church growth strategists in the late 1980s and onwards. It basically

1999), 157–227. For more on the history of dispensational premillennialism, see Ernest R. Sandeen, "Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," *Church History* 36, no. 1 (March 1967): 67–73.

²⁶ See, for example, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2011).

²⁷ See Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 218–223; George M. Marsden, "Fundamentalism and American Evangelism," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 26–37.

²⁸ For more on postmillennialism, see Kenneth L. Gentry, "Postmillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 13–57.

²⁹ Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987), 153–58; Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 225–37.

³⁰ Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, 160–67.

references the eschatological vision found in a number of places in the New Testament, which presupposes the conversion of “all nations” as a condition to Christ’s second coming (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 7:9, 15:4). However, the movement clarifies that the word “nation” used in the Bible does not refer to geopolitical entities, which we call countries but instead to tribes or people groups.³¹ Hence, Christ’s return shall depend on the evangelization of all people groups of the world. As Jim Montgomery, the late founder of DAWN, asserts: “When this happens in every country in the world, we can almost hear the trumpet sound. The primary task the Lord gave his Church is close to completion, and the Lord can soon return for his bride.”³²

Somewhat similar to some features of DAWN 2000 is the recently emerged “seven mountains” missions strategy that is finding traction among Neo-charismatics or Third Wave renewalists today. However, unlike DAWN 2000, this movement redefines the term “nations” to the “seven nations” (Deut. 7:1) or, more prominently, “seven mountains” (Rev. 17:9) of sphere of influence in society, namely: 1) church, 2) family, 3) education, 4) government and law, 5) media, 6) arts, entertainment, and sports, and 7) commerce, science, and technology.³³ Proponents teach that it is our assignment to “invade” and “disciple” each mountain until Christ’s Kingdom is fully established in each one of them since his return depends on it. As one of its prominent promoters argues: “We hasten Jesus’ return by fulfilling the assignment He has given us. He will continue to let generation after generation die—and not return—until one generation gets the assignment and fulfill his will on Earth as it is in Heaven.”³⁴ As we can see here, the resurgence of postmillennialism through both DAWN 2000 and the seven mountain mission strategies marks a shift in American evangelical’s understanding of missions as it leads them towards a more active engagement of the world and society. While postmillennialism promotes a more vigorous missions activity among Christians, it, nevertheless, undermines the very essence of *missio Dei* by inadvertently putting a lot of stock on human agency—that we are the ones who have to fulfill certain conditions for Christ to return. Any mission eschatology that makes Christ subservient to our missionary activity needs to be rethought. What then must be done to check such tendency? I believe Wesleyan eschatology provides the answer.

³¹ Jim Montgomery, *Dawn 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989), 89.

³² *Ibid.*, 13.

³³ See Lance Wallnau, “The Seven Mountain Mandate,” in *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate*, ed. Lance Wallnau (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), 53–55. Wallnau traces the origin of the seven mountain prophecy from Loren Cunningham of Youth with A Mission and Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ.

³⁴ Johnny Enlow, *The Seven Mountain Prophecy: Unveiling the Coming Elijah Revolution* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2008), 186.

Despite these recent developments, the United Methodist Church is still yet to articulate its mission in light of Wesley's eschatology. I, therefore, recommend that we seriously take into account Wesley's emphasis on the new creation, which bypasses the sequence of end-time events in Revelation, which is crucial to both dispensational premillennial and postmillennial thinking. He instead highlights that the ultimate end goal of the *missio Dei* is healing. In his interpretation of Revelation 21, he described the new heaven and new earth in this way: "As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for, or parting with, friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying."³⁵ Clearly, for Wesley, healing is God's ultimate goal for the world, but where does he put Christians in this plan? In his sermon, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," he answers this by asking: "Why has Christianity done so little good in the world? Is it not the balm, the outward means, which the Great Physician has given to men to restore their spiritual health?"³⁶ Wesley clearly contrasts God's role to ours by calling God the "Great Physician" who does the work of healing while also asserting that Christianity or Christians are God's healing "balm." In Wesley's scheme, we are merely participants in God's mission (*missio Dei*) of putting an end to death and suffering. But instead of adopting the postmillennial vision whereby we create the conditions for Christ's return, I will advocate for coherence. Making our actions cohere with God's ultimate plan of a new heaven and new earth through the agency of the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*) will allow us to have a more humble approach to missions and, consequently, affirm the very essence of the *missio Dei* concept which recognizes that we are not the ones who do missions.

If God is out to heal the world, we need to be coherent with God's work of healing. Such call for coherence should compel us to seriously observe the first two general rules of Wesley for the Methodist societies, namely: 1) "by doing no harm" and 2) "by doing good."³⁷ First, coherence means that we do no harm. We are not to do anything that directly counters God's ongoing work of healing upon the world. Let not our actions cause death or inflict pain and suffering. We need to constantly root out any practices, policies, actions, and activities in our churches that help perpetuate abuse or injustice to people. But coherence is not merely about not doing harm, but also about being actively engaged in doing good. For to do good means we are to proactively offer up ourselves as God's healing balm to problems or issues relating to ecology, poverty, food security, health, healthcare, immigration, labor, population control, war, race, human sexuality, and other social issues. Through the

³⁵ Wesley, "The New Creation," § 18, in *Works*, 2:510.

³⁶ John Wesley, Sermon 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," § 1, in *Sermons IV*, in *Works*, 4:86.

³⁷ John Wesley, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle Upon Tyne" (1743), II.4, in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, in *Works*, 9:70–72.

empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we must work towards relieving or eradicating all forms of suffering by opposing systemic evils that affect the poor and vulnerable. Additionally, to serve as God's healing balm to death, pain, and suffering also means that we need to be open to the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit by engaging in divine healing or signs and wonders ministries. Like the disciples after Pentecost, we are to actively pray for the healing of the sick through the laying on of hands believing that God heals even today.

But, for Wesley, God's healing project is not merely limited to addressing death, pain, and suffering but also deals with their root cause which is sin. Continuing his interpretation of Revelation 21, he asserts: "Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin."³⁸ Hence, God's healing project also involves the eradication of sin, which Wesley calls a "greater deliverance." This then reminds us of the holistic nature of *missio Dei* as God deals not only with the physical or material but also the spiritual. It is therefore not an accident that Wesley emphasizes the therapeutic (healing) aspect of salvation over its forensic (legal) aspect by outlining the role of the Holy Spirit in the healing process through the different manifestations of God's prevenient grace in our spiritual journey. He teaches that the Holy Spirit is actively at work in our awakening (through convincing grace), justification/new birth (through justifying grace), and Christian perfection (through sanctifying grace). Since we are God's healing balm, we are therefore called to partner with the Holy Spirit through evangelism and discipleship so that people might be awakened from spiritual slumber and repent (Matt. 3:7, Eph. 5:14), experience justification (Rom. 5:1, Eph. 2:8) and new birth (John 3:3, 2 Cor. 5:17), and grow towards perfect love (Heb. 6:1, 1 John 4:18).³⁹

Missio Spiritus is Christ-Centered

Finally, the multiplicity of tongues at Pentecost not only mirrors the eschatological vision of a new heaven and a new earth that is anticipated by the *missio Spiritus* but also points us to the very character and nature of Christ. This speaks directly to the way we do missions. When empires conquer weak nations, they embark on a project of assimilation that involves the conquering of the language of native peoples. For a language conquered is equals to control. However, in God's economy of salvation, God does the opposite. God, instead, chose to speak our language. God spoke in tongues through the incarnation: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Jesus, the Word took on flesh. This, therefore, shows that through Jesus, the Triune God spoke in tongues! Jesus did not force

³⁸ Wesley, "The New Creation," § 18, in *Works*, 2:510.

³⁹ For more on Wesley's understanding of salvation, see, for example, Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, 7.2.2007 edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 121-312.

people into submission. He was God, and yet he did not impose his divinity upon us but instead became a servant even to the point of death (Phil. 2:5-8). As the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama aptly asserts, Jesus journeyed from the “centre” to the “periphery.”⁴⁰ We see in Jesus’ self-emptying (kenosis) a picture of God’s humility. Hence, one of the hallmarks of the *missio Spiritus* is humility. It is never about the propagation of an imperial kingdom. It also repudiates the ways by which Christian missions colluded with the western colonialism of the past to subjugate other cultures.

Consequently, Pentecost is not about gaining an advantage over another person. It is essentially about being more like Jesus. So when the disciples spoke in tongues, they too became like Jesus. Simply put, they too became flesh for the nations. From Jerusalem, they went into Judea, Samaria, and into the uttermost parts of the world. They became the extension of the incarnation of Jesus. Similarly, Pentecost enables us to be extensions of Christ’s incarnation. We are to model Jesus to the world. He is our framework for *missio Dei*. Since Jesus’ incarnation, fully expressed through his suffering and death, is the ultimate expression of God’s love (1 John 4:10), love then becomes our only motivation. Perhaps we will be better off if we only rediscover the full ramifications of Wesley’s teaching on Christian perfection when he explained: “By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions.”⁴¹ We participate with the Holy Spirit in mission simply out of love and neither for self-preservation nor restoration of a Christian hegemony in this post-Christian America. May United Methodists rediscover this same love that will motivate us to offer ourselves up as God’s healing balm not only in the United States but also to the rest of the world.

⁴⁰ Kosuke Koyama, *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: Pilgrimage in Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 251-56.

⁴¹ John Wesley, “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” § 1, in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, in *Works*, 13:199.

ECHOES OF AMOS AND JOHN WESLEY: ESTABLISHING A MODEL OF MINISTRY FOR THE CHURCH OF THE PANDEMIC

By Rhoneil M. Arevalo, Ph.D.

Introduction

The pandemic caught the whole world by surprise. Nations after nations fell like dominoes to the deadly effects of the invisible foe. The state imposed lockdowns of cities and territories to check the spread of the virus. Large gatherings of people were discouraged and disallowed by state authorities. Suddenly, churches all over the country are prevented from congregating. Fellowship and the proclamation of the word are no longer possible at the moment. How can the church be the church without these functions?

This study aims to articulate and describe a ministry model for the United Methodist Church in the Philippines during the pandemic. To achieve this, Amos' preaching and John Wesley's social ethics will be consulted and studied to arrive at some parameters that will shape the aforementioned ecclesial model.

The Socio-Economic Context of Amos' Prophecy

The split of Israel with the southern kingdom of Judah at the close of the 10th century BCE proved to be a great blessing-in-disguise. For more or less than seventy years, Israel was absorbed in the Davidic dynasty, losing its identity as an independent kingdom and resulting in the inevitable muting of its religio-historical tradition. After Solomon's death, the ten tribes of Israel broke away from the Davidic Judah and forged their own course of history.

The kings of the newly independent Israel, particularly the Omride dynasty (Omri and Ahab, 885-851 BCE), crafted domestic and foreign policies that proved highly successful. The Omride dynasty put Israel on the map as a strong military power in the Syria-Palestine region, as witnessed in the records of the Monolith Inscription.¹ 1 Kings reports that Omri and Ahab were best remembered for their

¹ J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 269-270.

numerous building projects (see 1 Kings 16:24, 32; 22:39).² In other words, Israel reached the pinnacle of success under the Omrides, which, however, received bad press from the Deuteronomistic Historian.

The international policy adopted by Omri and Ahab was taken perhaps from the playbook of Solomon. Intermarriages often sealed agreements with foreign sovereign kingdoms. Jezebel, the hated wife of King Ahab, is described unfavorably in 1 Kings 16:31 as the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Phoenician kingdom of Sidon. Intermarriage, however, was an essential component of ancient international agreements, just as the signing of contracts or memorandum of agreements by contracting nations is to our time. Accords entered with other kingdoms expanded Israel's opportunities on almost all fronts, including political, military, and economic.

The one great benefit of these foreign treaties was the opening up of markets for Israelite goods to international markets and vice-versa. Economic prosperity ensued as a result of this commercial exchange. A new class of wealthy Israelites composed chiefly of merchants rose to prominence. This nascent *nouveau riche* of the 8th-century Israelite social structure either ingratiated itself to the monarch or became the object of the king's envy, as was demonstrated in the story of Naboth (1 Kings 21). Either way, economic prosperity was seen as the direct result of the liberal foreign policy of the Omrides.

There was one serious problem, though. The sudden surge of the floodwater of commercial and wealth-making opportunities stopped dead at the doorsteps of the king's palace and the houses of his cronies. Wealth was not distributed evenly to the rest of Israel. The mighty people of Israel filtered all the gains that they could get from these commercial activities and siphoned them off to benefit themselves. In doing so, prosperity was confined to a minuscule segment of Israelite society. In other words, the economic gains derived from the buying and the selling endeavors did not trickle down to all the members of society. The distribution or division of wealth was confined within the circle of the "rich and powerful."

This situation persisted even when the Omride kings were displaced by another set of dynasts, the house of Jehu. Prophet Amos preached during the reign of the third monarch in the line of the Jehu dynasty, Jeroboam II (785-745 BCE), as the prophet himself stated in Amos 1:1. Jeroboam II was celebrated in 2 Kings 14:25,

He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.

² All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

Jeroboam II was credited for his efforts in the national restoration by recovering the boundaries of Israel lost to the enemies by previous kings. Such was a significant accomplishment by an Israelite king. But he failed to reform the decaying society where the monarch-oligarchs continued to hold their sway on the people's lives. The socio-economic inequality persisted and went on unabated. The king lent a blind eye to the abuses committed by the rich against the poor. Jeroboam II did not lift a finger to create an atmosphere that would encourage the rich to share their wealth with the impoverished masses. He allowed the sins of the wealthy to remain unchecked. 2 Kings 14:24 is not particularly kind to Jeroboam II's kingship.

The sin of Jeroboam II is, of course, apostasy. But as we shall see later, apostasy is not only exclusively confined in the act of forsaking Yahweh, the God of Israel. Apostasy, likewise, translates or manifests itself in the social, economic, and political spheres. In leading the people to the veneration of the gods of the uncircumcised, Jeroboam II opened up Israel to an odd social-political-economic system that was not compatible with their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. If the king did not act to reverse this appalling and egregious situation, the prophet of Yahweh would take matters into his own hands! Amos, the man from Tekoa, a village in Judah, would cross the boundary to denounce the evil that prospered in the Northern Kingdom.

Amos launched a scathing attack against Israel, specifically directed at the wealthy people of that kingdom, and is recorded for posterity in the eponymous prophetic book in the Old Testament. What were the sins of Israel that the prophet denounced with so much rhetorical force? What were the social and economic costs of those iniquities?

The Sins of Amos' Israel

Before zeroing in on the sins of Israel, Amos first sets the background from which he would draw his accusations leading to a very tight case against the wealthy and the powerful of the Northern Kingdom. Amos' strategy as God's prosecuting attorney was to recite first a litany of transgressions of the neighboring people who worshiped other gods before finally settling to state his charges against Israel. Coogan describes this prophetic style as a carefully patterned series of oracles in which Yahweh first announces his judgment on the nations surrounding Israel and then on Israel itself.³

Amos 1:3-2:5 contains the prophet's charges against the Canaanite nations, including Judah. Amos charged Syria with employing savage cruelty against the people of Gilead (Amos 1.3). The brutality is such that it was not a 'one-time affliction' but a continuous or repeated kind of mayhem against the victim people.

³ Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament, A Very Short Introduction*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 84.

The intensifier “three transgressions . . . and for four” (לִישָׁלֹשָׁה . . . וְעַל־אַרְבָּעָה עֵ) signifies a progression or increasing in intensity of the cruelty employed by the Syrians against the hapless Gileadites. The prophet trained his eyes next on Philistia. He charged that the Philistines were guilty of human trafficking (v.6), and they profited from this criminal act when they sold their captives to Edom as slaves. Such action was not a one-time affair too as the previous formula for indicating the piling up of sin upon sin is again employed by Amos. Tyre is next, and the city-state’s sin was unfaithfulness to the agreement entered into with other nations (v.9). The people of the city were also guilty of human trafficking. Edom was cited for the willingness to commit fratricide (v.11),

Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Edom,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because he pursued his brother with the sword
and cast off all pity;
he maintained his anger perpetually,
and kept his wrath forever.

The prophet charged the city-state of Ammon for two grievous offenses that it committed, namely, illegal enlargement of its territory and committing heinous war crimes against non-combatants (v.13),

Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of the Ammonites,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead
in order to enlarge their territory.

Moab did not escape notice and was charged with the crime of opening up the tomb and taking out the bones of the unknown king of Edom to be burned (Amos 2:1). This crime violated the shared custom of the Semitic peoples of honoring the dead. Judah, Amos’ own people, was included in the list of indicted nations for rejecting the law of Yahweh and for not keeping the statutes contained therein. As with the sins of Syria and Philistia, the transgressions of these people were habitual and even intensifying in the degree of malevolence. In Yahweh’s charges against these nations, the formula “three transgressions and four” was often repeated. For Amos, the transgression of these nations was the violation of the most basic norm of doing what is good and fair, that is, of justice and righteousness.

Why did Amos start with a recitation of the sins of the nations scattered all over Canaan? What function would this perform later on in his attack of the elites of Israel? David Carr notes that the focus of the teaching of Amos is on social acts

and their national consequences.⁴ Amos is presented here as the lawsuit messenger carrying God's case against Israel.⁵ The charges against these nations would serve as the frame from which his critique of Israel's socio-economic sins would proceed. The bottom line seems to be that the worship of other gods introduced a way of living that was entirely at odds with the value system that Yahweh taught in Israel and Judah. In Yahweh's community, the norm is fairness and goodness. Everyone is to share equally in the natural resources that the God of Israel had showered on his people. No one is to take over and above what is expected of him/her. Likewise, no one is to take less. Everyone should take and receive what is enough to meet their needs daily. No one is to hoard. The same is true of the manna in the wilderness. Brueggemann and Lineman describe the prophetic book of Amos as "a powerful social critique that is rooted in a vigorous Yahwistic sense of what is required and what is possible in a covenantal society."⁶

But when Israel chose to abandon God, it embraced the gods of the neighboring people and acquired from them the rotten system that the worship of false gods engendered. Israel learned the ropes of human trafficking (Amos 2.6),

Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Israel,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals.

The rich people in Israel became heartless individuals who, to recoup the money lost to bad debt, sold into slavery honest people who could not pay their debts. Their value system was so distorted that the needy to them is only worth as a pair of sandals would cost. These same people did not recoil in using violence if it meant enriching themselves. The prophet conveyed in a very colorful way Yahweh's charges against them,

The LORD says, "These people fill their mansions with things taken by crime and violence. They don't even know how to be honest." (Amos 3:10, GNT)

The very value that the LORD had taught them in the wilderness was replaced by deadly greed. Crime and violence were tools available to them to increase

⁴ David M. Carr, *An Introduction to the Old Testament, Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 104.

⁵ Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 429.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann and Tod Lineman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament, The Canon and Christian Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 256.

their wealth further. These nefarious activities were the rich able to collect luxurious couches (v.12), winter and summer houses (v.15). The women of Samaria became as fat as the cows of Bashan (Amos 4.1). They were able to absorb the evils that the Samarian men did and employed in the performance of their daily chores,

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
who are on Mount Samaria,
who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
who say to their husbands, "Bring something to drink!"

Both men and women of Israel did evil things in the sight of Yahweh. With no sense of fairness and goodness to guide the people, they did what was right in their view. This meant that the only good thing for them was that which would benefit them personally. If righteous people were to stand up to question in the court of law something unjust, the wealthy would undoubtedly oppose them (Amos 5:10). They even had the gall to take advantage and oppress the poor farmers by robbing them of their farm yields (v.11a). These distortions in the norms of justice paved the way for dismantling the covenant value of justice and righteousness. In its stead was installed an unjust system that eventually came together with the worship of the Baals,

For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate. (v.12)

The only concern of the elite seemed to be the accumulation of more goods and the pursuit of an easy life. The rulers of this nation amassed great wealth so that they had plenty of time to stretch out on their luxurious couches (Amos 6:4), to sing and play musical instruments (v.5), to drink wine from bowls (v.6), to pour on themselves the finest oil/perfume available, and to live inside luxurious mansions (v.8). The shameless flaunting of the ruling class's wealth took place while the rest of Yahweh's people lived in poverty. The wealthy cronies of the powerful were likewise charged with economic crimes. They couched these crimes under cover of false religiosity. They regarded the worship of the LORD as a waste of time which they preferred to spend instead by furthering their business through cheating,

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,

so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances.
(Amos 8:4-5)

The conscience of Israel's upper class was hardened by the crass materialism of the day. The rich people no longer knew what is right from wrong. All that they care about was the enrichment of the self. Poor people in their estimate no longer had any worth or value. They were simply commodities that they could trade.

We can sell worthless wheat at a high price. We'll find someone poor who can't pay his debts, not even the price of a pair of sandals, and we'll buy him as a slave. (Amos 8:6, GNT)

Amos saw where the problem lies. It is in the inversion of the *Torah* values that Yahweh had tried to instill in Israel's consciousness in the wilderness. Israel had not learned after all. How easy was it for Yahweh's Israel to forget that they were *distinct people*, essentially and naturally different from the nations that inhabited Canaan! Amos condemned Israel for what Israel really was,

But you have turned justice into poison
and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood. (Amos 6:12b)

Why was Amos' preaching so scathing against Israel? Where did he get the awareness that Israel had committed a grave error in following the ways of its neighbors? What is Amos' concept of justice and righteousness that he could point so powerfully the sins of Israel's upper class?

Justice and Righteousness in the Prophetic Message of Amos

Amos' concept of *justice* and *righteousness* begins in his understanding that ancient Israel was in a covenant relationship with her God,

You only have I known
of all the families of the earth. (Amos 3.2a)

These six words in Hebrew—**רַק אֲתֶכֶם יָדַעְתִּי מִכָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאֲדָמָה** (literal, only you I know from all families of the earth)—convey the special place that Israel enjoyed in the heart and mind of Yahweh. Israel was chosen by this God, not for any of the unique qualities its people possessed. It had nothing to boast. Israel was the fewest, the newest, and the weakest among the nations already settled in Canaan. The basis of this divine choice was no other than *grace*:

It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you . . . (Deut. 7:7-8a)

The text illustrates the divine election of Israel. When Yahweh elected Israel to be his people, a relationship began to exist. Such was an unequal relationship, to start with, because it is a relationship that binds together the sovereign and the subject people and vice versa. This kind of contractual agreement was known to the ancients as “suzerainty.” In this contractual or covenantal agreement, the superior party was expected to protect the weaker ones, especially during times of war. The lesser party to the contract was expected to obey the requirements that the superior demanded. There were penalties reserved for the subject in cases of a breach in the contract.

Yahweh gave Israel sets of laws to live by. Yahweh gave the law to Moses at a time when Israel was wandering in the desert. The law was never meant to be a burden to Israel. Again, the law was Yahweh’s expression of his grace to these former slaves. The law meant life for the nascent nation of Israel in the desert. Without Yahweh’s commandments, the people of Israel might murder one another, steal each other’s possessions, dishonor family elders, or commit other acts of disobedience. Yahweh’s ordinances, rules, and regulations gave the community a social structure to support these sojourners while in the wilderness.

This covenant relationship elevated Israel into a special class of people. Israel was to be a distinct people, separated from the rest of the nations on earth,

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deut. 7:6)

The calling of Israel was to be holy. To be holy means that Israel was separated from the rest of the peoples to become the exclusive possession of Yahweh and thus, could demand from its complete loyalty and obedience to his will. Devotion to Yahweh also meant that Israel should not even dare to imitate the way of life of the nations surrounding it. The injunction against the worship of Canaanite gods did not only have in view the sin of idolatry, but it also looked askance on the possibility that this would lead to a social-economic-political-religious system inimical to what Yahweh had intended for Israel. Exodus 23:33 calls the worship of false gods a fatal trap for its reach was wide and all-encompassing, that is, it would corrupt all aspects of Israelite life.

For this reason, Amos harked back to the covenant theology that was forged while Yahweh was leading the now-freed slaves out of Egypt (Amos 3:1). Amos

reminded Israel that the Exodus was a concrete demonstration of Yahweh's deep care for Israel. However, the Israel of Amos' time had forgotten this and embraced the Canaanite gods that Yahweh had forbidden time and time again. Israel's deliberate setting aside of Yahweh's favor was what made its sins so hurtful to the deity,

That is what makes your sins so terrible, and that is why I must
punish you for them. (Amos 3:2b, GNT)

What if Israel did not relapse to the worship of false gods? What would have happened instead? Israel would not commit the gross abuses that the rich and the powerful had inflicted on the poor. Israel would undoubtedly know what justice and righteousness were. Israel would become the model community that neighboring nations would look up to. The Canaanites would see fairness and goodness all over Israel because the LORD is Israel's God.

From the very beginning of the biblical story, justice and righteousness were already understood as the way of Yahweh (Genesis 18:19). Amos is merely reiterating it because Israel was not able to learn these twin values. Amos corrected the rich and powerful's misconception that justice and righteousness could be achieved by doubling up on their burnt offerings as if Yahweh could be bribed (Amos 5:21-23). Observance of festivals, noisy worship, and generous offerings could not simply meet the demand that the covenant values of justice and righteousness so required of them. Instead, Yahweh, through the prophet Amos simplified what the twin values of justice and righteousness were like,

But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

Yahweh illustrated to the people of Israel what he meant when he spoke about these covenant values. He encouraged the people to exercise their imagination and visualize justice and righteousness as water that could flow in the directions that it is led to. In the LORD's perspective, the two, though inseparable, are slightly distinct from one another. Righteousness seems to be the source of justice. Righteousness is likened to a river and justice to a stream. Therefore, it is righteousness that supplied justice with the norms of goodness that would, in turn, determine whether a specific action is either fair or unjust. Righteousness is understood as doing what is right or proper or upright. Right or proper acts should always lead to what is good. There is no room for abuse in righteousness. On the other hand, as the tributary of righteousness, justice is the system or path by which a righteous act is distributed evenly to all members of Israelite society. It is characterized by fairness.

The jussive mood by which the passage is expressed tells about the possibility that the evil efforts of the elite could block justice and righteousness. In the time of

Amos, this was the prevailing condition. Israel learned to thwart the covenant values by embracing the destructive influences of the neighboring peoples. For this reason, the abovementioned passage was expressed in a command form so that the people would remove the obstacles that impeded the flow of justice and righteousness in Israel. Once these blocks were taken out of the way, justice and righteousness would freely flow and reach every member of the Israelite society.

It is noteworthy to mention that Israel's southern kin, Judah, was included in the list of the erring nations at the very beginning of the Book of Amos. Judah rejected the law of Yahweh and did not keep his statutes (Amos 2.4-5). Judah's unfaithfulness to the covenant merits its inclusion in Yahweh's oracles against these stubborn nations. Likewise, in Israel, the social inequities, abuse, and oppression of the poor stemmed from a deliberate violation and neglect of the law of Yahweh. Their disobedience was the stumbling block that prevented them from achieving their potential as the covenant people of God. Israel's stubbornness served as the obstacle that prevented justice and righteousness from flowing freely in the land. When Yahweh demanded, "let justice roll down like a stream, righteousness like a river," the deity seems to invite his people to revisit the law and keep its statutes. Amos declares in 5:15 (GNT),

Hate what is evil, love what is right, and see that justice prevails
in the courts. Perhaps the LORD will be merciful to the people of this
nation who are still left alive.

Hating evil, loving what is right, and seeing that justice wins in the courts are the requirements of justice and righteousness. This message seems to reverberate in the social ethics of John Wesley. What is the place of Amos' message in the thoughts of Wesley?

John Wesley's Social Ethics

Amos' preaching on justice and righteousness centers on the moral breakdown in ancient Israelite society, primarily manifested through the socio-economic abuse of the poor by the rich. The rich continue to hoard the national wealth while debasing and objectifying the poor as worth no more than the sandals of their feet. The prophetic criticism is directed both at the heart of the Israelite where evil is conceived and in the consequent action emanating from his or her wicked thought.

Wesley's social ethics intersects with Amos' call for justice and righteousness. For the prophet, the abuse and exploitation of the poor by the wealthy and the powerful in ancient Israelite society emanated from the greed that grew inside the heart and mind of an individual. This greed found negative fruition in the oppression and exploitation of the impoverished of Israel. While the prophet sounds

the alarm bell, Wesley lights the lamp in the night so that one can safely tread the path to justice and righteousness.

Wesley employed the concepts of justification and righteousness much differently as Amos understood justice and righteousness. Firstly, they were completely different biblical jargons. Wesley leans closer to the apostle Paul than Amos in this as the former understood the twin theological concepts in making humans right before God. In John Wesley's mind, God reconciles himself with humankind because of the merits of Christ and not because of any human effort. There is no such perspective in Amos. The prophet simply views justice and righteousness in the act of doing what is right, good, and proper and practicing this virtue throughout all society. Yet their views intersect in the social dimension of these concepts. Goodness needs to be expressed in the social realm to be effective, says Amos. God's saving grace is not meant to be a personal sort of salvation but is expected to be expressed in the love and service of others, so says Wesley. For him, the concrete expression of human gratitude for receiving the divine grace is instead tested in the use of money, the very same pitfall that entrapped Israel. Amos' starting point in his critique of Israel's rejection of justice and righteousness was its willful disobedience of the covenant demands. Wesley's starting point is relatively positive. It begins with his soteriology. He laid down the premise for his social ethics in *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith and Good Works, Extracted from the Homilies of the Church of England*.⁷ Albert Outler offers this interesting insight about the aforementioned tract, especially as it concerns Wesley's use of the resources available to him. Outler writes,

The following tract (i.e., *The Doctrinal Summaries*) is one of the results of that inquiry: his first published doctrinal manifesto. It went through nineteen editions in his lifetime and was a staple item in Methodist instruction It is a good example of Wesley's way of working: his material is borrowed, *but its form and use are distinctively his own* *His choice of the first five Edwardian Homilies to digest is significant because it locates the core of his own doctrinal position* It is interesting to compare Cranmer's text and Wesley's abridgment of it. What the latter did was simply to excise every passage in Cranmer that could be eliminated without mangling the nerve of the argument *yet if ever Wesley made another man's words his very own, he did so in this instance. Salvation, Faith and Good Works is, therefore, a genuine fundament of the Wesleyan theology* (emphasis mine).⁸

⁷ John Wesley, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (NY: Oxford University Press, 1964), 123-133.

⁸ Albert Outler, *John Wesley*, 121-123.

One may glean from Outler Wesley's skillful redaction of Cranmer's sermons to fit his own theological perspective. In *The Doctrine* tract, Wesley seems to embrace Cranmer's theological positions on salvation, faith and good works while transforming them to become his own through his editorial efforts.

In the sermon, "Of the Salvation of Mankind,"⁹ Wesley seems to share the view ~~admits~~ that humanity's relationship with God was tainted with sin. The vertical relationship between the Creator and his good creation was ripped apart and torn down by human sin. The problem, thus, becomes not only spiritual but existential too. God, in his immeasurable mercy, took the initiative to correct the situation. This divine corrective initiative is understood by Wesley, following Paul, as the justification and righteousness of God. This is solely God's decision and action; no human help is required here. Wesley says that this is God's office only. God's mercy moved about God's reconciliatory action, and this was because of God's righteousness. God's goodness was made visible for everyone to experience through the merits of Christ. By this, Wesley means that Christ fulfilled all the requirements of the law through his ministry, teachings, and death on the cross. Christ's crucifixion made possible the justification of sinful human beings as God no longer sees the blight of human sin but the red blood of Jesus Christ. This understanding is what the practical theologian calls God's justice. In his reflection of the subject, Wesley surmises that justification and righteousness could be understood as having three components, namely: 1) God's part, expressed in his infinite mercy and grace; 2) Christ's part, the fulfillment of the law through his sacrificial merits; and 3) the human part, the proper human response in true and lively faith.

Faith as the human being's response perfects and finalizes justification. God's mercy and Christ's merits are always available to the individual. This is prevenient grace. Acceptance of this free gift by the person prodded by the Spirit of God completes and seals the redemption of the unworthy human being. But why is divine intervention needed in the salvation of humankind? Wesley sees in the human being his inability to meet God's standard because he or she is, first of all, a sinner before God and, secondly, a breaker of the divine law. Such being the case, human works can neither justify nor make righteous a person before God. But why was faith added to this soteriological equation? Wesley makes this point about the necessity of faith, "And it was only when love was lost by sin that faith was added . . . to restore man to the love from which he was fallen."¹⁰

Such was the devastating effect of primal sin. Love was replaced by enmity. It took God's merciful first step towards true reconciliation through the sacrifices of Christ that humans are justified and made righteous. The final step to complete this process is the acceptance of this gift by faith. While faith perfects justification and

⁹ Wesley, *John Wesley*, 123-133.

¹⁰ John Wesley, "The Law Established by Faith, Faith at Work," in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (NY: Oxford University Press, 1964), 228.

righteousness, the renewal of the person toward holiness remains to be an ongoing work of the Spirit on him or her. Wesley appears to reiterate Cranmer's position in *Of the Salvation of Mankind* that faith neither nullifies nor shuts out good works but is "necessary to be done afterwards, of duty towards God."¹¹ In his mind, as the individual is led to his/her justification before God by faith; faith, likewise, brings him/her into a spirit of thanksgiving or gratitude for the graceful change in his/her lot from damnation into redemption. The justified person is now prodded by faith towards a loving heart, energizing him or her into obeying God's commandment. Obedience to the laws of God must translate into good works, thus affirming Cranmer's position,

. . . these great and merciful benefits of God (will) move us to render ourselves unto God wholly, with all our hearts, might and power, to serve him in all good [works], to seek in all things his glory, evermore dreading to offend in word, thought or deed such a merciful God and loving Redeemer.¹²

The faith that is translated into good works is understood by him as "true Christian faith."¹³ Wesley follows Cranmer in his contrasts of ~~this~~ the faith that "worketh by love" following Galatians 5:6 with the idle or unfruitful type. ~~He~~ Cranmer calls this faith "quick" or "living faith." Wesley agrees with him in the position that this faith is not merely a subscription to the church's doctrines or its articles of faith. Far from it! A quick or living faith places the justified person into a sense of readiness to obey and serve God. Wesley shares with Cranmer the perspective that this true Christian faith as hopeful, trusting in God, and loving God and neighbor. Thus, the faith that completes the justification initiative of God is not bereft of good works. Wesley seems to draw out from the theological fount provided by his predecessor, ". . . the soul that hath a [living] faith will be always doing some good work, which shall declare that it is living."¹⁴

Wesley in agreement with the reasoning that good works are dependent on this "true Christian faith." This living faith is related to good works in essentially three ways. First, this living faith bears forth fruits of good works. By this principle, Wesley may mean that true faith will always manifest itself in good works. He was

¹¹ John Wesley, "Of the Salvation of Mankind, Doctrinal Summaries," in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (NY: Oxford University Press, 1964), 126.

¹² John Wesley, "Of the Salvation of Mankind, Doctrinal Summaries" 128.

¹³ John Wesley, "Of True Christian Faith," in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (NY: Oxford University Press, 1964) pp.129-133.

¹⁴ John Wesley, "Of True Christian Faith," 130.

convinced that it cannot be hidden. He is firm in the belief that a person with this type of faith “will always be doing good work, which shall declare that it is living.”¹⁵

Secondly, without it, no one could do good works. The Johannine metaphor of the vine and its fruits (John 15:4-5) is likewise understood by Wesley to support this perspective. The type of faith that he advocated is the one that is living; the proof of its very existence is the fruits of the good work that it consequently must produce. Failure to produce good works follows that this faith is dead.

Thirdly, the kind of good works that this faith produces. Wesley likewise asks, what kind of good works does a living faith need to produce? The answer is drawn from Jesus’s story about the rich young man recorded in Matthew 19:16-19. Wesley shares Cranmer’s conclusion that the type of good works that a living faith must produce is that which proceeds from obedience to the works of the commandments of God that Christ taught in the gospels.

These descriptions of the true Christian faith that John Wesley proclaims understands do not sanction private Christianity. He believed strongly that the grace of God expressed concretely in the justification of sinful humanity does not stop in the human response of merely believing or trusting in this truth. A faith that gets stalled in the justification phase is to Wesley a dead faith because it merely remained abstractly somewhere in the believer's mind.¹⁶ For faith to become vibrant, it must be expressed in the fulfillment of Jesus’ great commandment—love of God and love of neighbor. ¹⁷Wesley speaks unequivocally against solitary holiness, for there exists no such a thing in his mind and Jesus’ teachings in the gospels. Wesley is convinced that the true Christian faith must evidence itself in good works; articulated as well by Cranmer in this manner,

Cast in your minds how you may do good unto all men, unto your powers, and hurt [none] Oppress not, kill not, beat not, neither slander nor hate any man; but love all men, speak well of all men, help and succour every man as you may, yea, even your enemies that hate you, that speak evil of you and hurt you. Take no man’s goods nor covet your neighbour’s goods, but [be content with your own] and bestow [them] charitably, as need requireth.¹⁸

These heartwarming words clearly illustrate what Wesley had in mind when he talked about social holiness. Social holiness is the end phase in the economy of Wesley’s doctrine of the redemption of humankind. The act of receiving the gift of

¹⁵ John Wesley, “Of True Christian Faith,” 130.

¹⁶ John Wesley, “Of True Christian Faith,” 129.

¹⁷ John Wesley, “Of True Christian Faith,” 133.

¹⁸ John Wesley, “Of True Christian Faith,” 133.

justification by faith is an individual deed. However, the individual's proper response to justification is not private holiness but the bearing of good fruits.

It is in the social dimension of Amos' call for justice and righteousness and Wesley's doctrine of holiness that these great men meet to form a convergence of minds. Both believe that one's concern for what is right and proper must not be merely internalized or personalized. Both discerned that the good and uprightness proceeding from righteousness must be spread out equally and fairly to all human beings. The echo of Amos' call for justice and righteousness is heard audibly in John Wesley's concept of social holiness.

Wesley articulates the dynamics of his social ethics most clearly in his essays on the use of money and his thoughts on slavery.

Wesley's *The Use Of Money and His Thoughts On Slavery*

From among the many issues that John Wesley tackled or discussed in his lifetime, there is no subject matter more relevant to social holiness than the topics about the use of money and slavery. His thoughts on the use of money and slavery revealed how this concept played out in his mind. In these two areas, John Wesley seemed to find some contact points with the prophet Amos. It is noteworthy that the main line of the prophet's attack against the wealthy and the powerful proceeds from their socio-economic sins.

Wesley approaches the use of money from the angle of stewardship. Wesley's sermon, "The Use of Money, places the meat of his argument midway the sermon when he points out that the Christian was placed in the world not as a proprietor but as a steward."¹⁹ From the viewpoint of a steward, money serves not as an economic tool that corrupts but as an excellent gift of God available for use to meet noble endeavors or ends. He maintains: "In the hands of his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked. It gives to the traveller and the stranger where to lay his head."²⁰

Wesley assumes that Christians, whom he refers to as all who fear God, should know how to use money properly. This understanding proceeds from his earlier point that a Christian is simply a steward of this "valuable talent." He rightly considers that it is the "love of money" that is "the root of all evil," drawing from 1 Tim. 6:10, and "not the thing itself." But Christians, according to Wesley, need to be taught or instructed about the proper use of money so that they would become faithful stewards of the "mammon of unrighteousness."

His instructions were threefold. The first of which, "gain all you can," is likened by Wesley to a worldly counsel. In modern speech, his advice would sound to mean playing against the world in its own game when he says, "We meet them on

¹⁹ John Wesley, *The Use of Money, Faith at Work*, 239-250.

²⁰ John Wesley, *The Use of Money, Faith at Work*, 241.

their own ground.” The idea behind the advice is that a Christian is allowed to seek different sources of livelihood where opportunities to earn money would present themselves. However, the God-fearer must be extra-cautious. Lest the Christian falls into the traps laid down by the world, Wesley cautions them not to gain money at the cost of one’s life or in the impairment of his/her health. The principle governing this advice is that one may gain money provided it does not lead to losing his or her soul. “Gaining all you can” also admonishes the “God-fearers” to seek every opportunity to earn without hurting their neighbors in two ways: 1) in his substance, that is, in the taking of his properties by usury, etc. and in ruining his business, and 2) in selling anything that would impair his health.

The second part of Wesley’s instruction demands that while one is allowed to gain as much as he or she can, the individual is also instructed to “save all you can.” The guiding principle that governs this exhortation is the prohibition to spend not a portion of his derived income “to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life.” By gratifying the desire of the flesh, Wesley mainly means one’s indulging in food. Gratifying the desire of the eye zeroes in on acquiring “superfluous or expensive apparel;” in decorating houses with costly furniture, paintings, and the like; in maintaining “elegant gardens.” When Wesley speaks about the pride of life, he means that one cannot gain the admiration or praise of people by flaunting his or her wealth.

Wesley’s call to gain all you can and save all you can is tempered by his instruction to “give all you can.” The gaining and saving components meet their rationale in the giving function. It is in generosity where the steward role of the Christian comes into the picture. Wesley conceives the steward as being simply a trustee of the wealth whose true owner is God. The person does not own even life itself. In this giving mandate, Wesley exhorts the faithful to consider the income earned from various occupations as a holy sacrifice acceptable to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The giving component must consider these three guidelines in the following order: 1) provide for personal needs, 2) provide for the needs of the family, and 3) do good to all men. Even in the use of money, Wesley sees opportunities for social holiness to prosper.

The other key issue where John Wesley waded in is slavery. In the religious tract titled, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, Wesley defines slavery as “domestic slavery” where the relationship between a master and a servant exists.²¹ In this setup, slavery places an “obligation of perpetual service” that can only be terminated solely by the master. What Wesley refers to as domestic slavery is not simply confined in the private homes but more so with the state policy of supplying the colonies with warm bodies of slaves from Africa. The slave trade was the economic system of the time, mercantilism, imposed upon the colonizers, the British Empire. It is but proper for Wesley to attack

²¹ John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, 1st Electronic Edition (UNC Chapel Hill, 1999). Original Tract: London, 1778. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/wesley/wesley.html>

the legal cover for slavery which he calls the “grand plea” that they “are authorized by law.”²² Those who supported slavery insisted that it is “necessary” as the white man cannot work in warm places. The black man, according to this reasoning, is very much at home in a temperate climate. Greater productivity in the exploitation of the colonies is better assured if black labor is employed. Furthermore, the white man is doing the black man great favor as the former is uprooting him from his hostile and untamed environment. Likewise, the white man is teaching the black man the value of industry, seeing him as indolent, ignorant, and stubborn. Wesley spends large parts of the tract dispelling these unfounded generalizations.²³

The genius of Wesley’s reasoning in *Thoughts* lies in his questioning of the validity of the defense on the maintenance of slavery stated above. His main argument is that natural law cannot be displaced by human law. Marquardt opines, “Surpassing all positive law in rank and validity; natural law was endowed to every person, of whatever race, religion or nationality. Slaveholding could not be brought in harmony with this law in any way.”²⁴

Ten thousand laws crafted by the human minds cannot simply displace the natural law of right and wrong. Natural law places equal rights on both the Englishman and the African. Wesley raises these two stinging questions about justice to the Englishman in his treatment of the black slave,

Who can reconcile this treatment of the negroes, first and last, with either mercy or justice?
Where is the justice of inflicting the severest evils on those who have done us no wrong?²⁵

Wesley sounds like Amos here. But he goes a bit further when he tried to discomfit the peaceful and the undisturbed conscience of the fence-sitters. Wesley argues that they may not be involved in the actual slave trade per se. But their purchasing of slaves was indirect participation in this evil business, for they were enabling the slave traders to continue with their ungodly and unjust commerce. Francis J. McConnell offers this review of Wesley’s sense of social justice:

The whole system under which men live has to be filled with the assumption of the worth of man as man, which Wesley declared in the

²² John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, 33.

²³ John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, 39-43

²⁴ Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics, Praxis and Principles*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 74.

²⁵ Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, 34.

attack on slavery. This, after the criticism of enclosure, was Wesley's boldest assault on a social evil of his time.²⁶

Wesley comes very near to Amos' call for justice and righteousness in his thoughts on the proper use of money and on the issue of slavery. How can the prophet's message and Wesley's teaching be translated into the church's ministry during the pandemic?

Amos and John Wesley in the Church of the Pandemic

Amos and Wesley meet in their concern for the disadvantaged. Amos' critical eyes were directed to the socio-economic abuses of the rich toward the poor. Wesley encourages the 'God-fearers' to employ their monies to care for one's neighbors. Wesley's sensitive conscience to ~~one of~~ Jesus' great commandments compelled him to look around and be cognizant of the injustices happening in his own time. This is why he was able to speak against slavery. Why was Amos able to notice the abuses against the poor? Why was Wesley's conscience pricked by concern for the other one? Both men ministered outside of the confines of their study. They did not simply preach from the familiar setting of the sanctuary.

Before the pandemic, the Church merely contented itself in ministering within its premises. If it chooses to venture outside, it would be occasional, usually during its founding anniversary. The church was unwilling to make community concerns a sustainable, year-long ministry. It simply has no stamina for it. The following is another "mission malpractice" that will make you want to scratch your head. There are big churches in the city that picked out far-flung areas to be the site of their mission-evangelism ministry while neglecting the very communities where these congregations are situated. There was neither reason nor rhyme for such, as these mission sites are seldom visited anyway, and the mission fields are left to fend for themselves until the mission groups from those churches would find it convenient to return. Why did these become the norm of the church's mission and outreach programs? The church before the pandemic had shirked from the full-time responsibility of taking care of people within its vicinity. The pre-pandemic church was only committed to taking care of its own.

The starting point of this reflection is a critique of how the pre-pandemic church conducted its mission or outreach programs, merely contented in doing ministry within its grounds, not seeing the needs of its adjacent community. This tendency to look inwardly made it unimaginative, petty, and immature. The church managed its finances so that it only has to meet its own internal needs with little to spare for community outreach. In my experience as administrative pastor of local churches, I noticed that a sizable portion of the budget is reserved to meet the

²⁶ Francis J. McConnell, *John Wesley* (NY: Abingdon Press, 1939), 283.

administrative expenses of the church. No wonder the church finds it hard to meet the annual budget. Members of the church could not part with their hard-earned money as they see it unconscionable to underwrite a budget that only supports operating expenses. Large chunks of the church's fund go to waste for endeavors that do not have significant impacts on its real ministry as Christ's representative on earth. Will Wesley approve of the church's wasteful use of funds?

The pandemic exposed the church as to what it really is—irrelevant in these changing times. It has become unbearable listening to pastors preach via the internet talking about mission, stewardship, evangelism, and other issues that were regular staples of homilies during normal times as if there is no pandemic ravaging the world. How can this be? It is because the church has locked itself up inside its grand building for a long time now and ignores the fact that there is a pandemic out there that is tearing people's lives apart.

The pandemic obliterates everything; even the church is not spared. The church could no longer meet inside its hallowed walls in the meantime. COVID-19 forced the church to go outside, see the needs of the world, and minister to it. The church of the pandemic is the church that is moved by the pandemic to adjust its theological lens and various ministries to stay relevant in a world that cowers in fear. The lockdowns imposed by governments worldwide may inevitably result in the normalization of remoteness, impersonalization of relationships, and the resultant digitalization of some church ministries like the preaching and teaching functions of the church. How can the church stay afloat post-pandemic? How can the church stay relevant in the era of the pandemic?

Caring for the poor will never go out of style. Amos and Wesley will applaud the church if it gets out of the four corners of its sanctuary to minister to the needy, the poor, the underprivileged, and the economic victims of COVID-19. Caring for the other is what makes the church relevant, pandemic or no pandemic. Pre-pandemic, the support model is from below to the top—from the members to the church. This system pampered the church so badly that it turned obese and immobile. The pandemic and post-pandemic model should be from top to bottom, that is, from the church to the needy members and, by extension, to the poor of the community. Where would the church get the money for such a costly undertaking? The church saves a lot from a reduced administrative expense that normally eats up a large portion of the budget. It must set aside part of it to serve as seed money for this ministry. Following Wesley's call for "saving in order to give,"²⁷ the savings must be placed under a special account from where the church could draw funds for caring ministry. Then, the church must "sell" the ministry to members who have been spared from economic difficulties brought about by the pandemic. An essay, "Finances and the Local Church," published by the Discipleship Ministries on its website, points out that the church members "give to support what they believe is

²⁷ John Wesley, *The Use of Money, Faith at Work*, 247.

meaningful and worthwhile.”²⁸ Generosity is one of the many good traits of Methodists. The church must create ministry opportunities where members could participate whichever way they are able. This is true pre-COVID; it is also true now during the pandemic.

The church can also put together human resources from among its members and present to them ministry opportunities that match their skills. The church, for instance, may identify the areas where its ministry can make a dent in the community’s various needs. The church may determine, for instance, the health, education, and livelihood needs of the people. These concerns will become special ministries of the church. For example, retired or willing active medical doctors can be pooled together to lead the health component of the church’s caring ministry to attend to the community’s health concerns regularly. The same can be done for member-teachers who are to take charge of the educational component, i.e., developing ways to hold tutorial assistance to children belonging to low-income families. Members who own businesses can be encouraged to provide employment opportunities and skills training to the unemployed. The church can name it HEAL (for Health, Education, And Livelihood) Ministry. The pastor nurtures the HEAL ministers with reflections from the gospels to strengthen and help them find a greater purpose. In this way, HEAL becomes a praxis, reflection-action-further reflection-further action ministry. HEAL Ministry is not meant to convert people into Methodism. HEAL Ministry exists because the church loves God and neighbor.

This is the ministry of the church of the pandemic. This ministry model forces the church to engage fellowship (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*) in the very community that serves as its home. The church’s witnessing (*marturia*) may be done digitally in the meantime. The only way for the church to become relevant during the pandemic is to demonstrate the love of Christ to the needy people of the community. In this way, the church becomes the agent of justice and righteousness in the world victimized by the pandemic.

Conclusion

The poor are the subjects of God’s affection because they possess no economic means to help them tide over life. Their helplessness means that they neither have the voice nor the power to protect themselves against the abuses of the rich and the powerful. The Law of Moses acknowledges the vulnerability of the poor, and so statutes like this one urged the rest of Israel to provide generous assistance to them,

²⁸ “Finances and the Local Church,” *Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church*, October 5, 2006. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/finances-and-the-local-church>.

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land. (Deut. 15:11)

Amos and Wesley took by heart this Mosaic appeal. Their preaching and benevolent acts provided the church of the pandemic with an ecclesiological model to pattern its overall ministry. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted almost all aspects of life, leaving in its wake millions of individuals and families impoverished. Therefore, there is a need to retool or tweak in a very creative but responsive way the traditional manner by which our churches perform their ministries—refusal to adjust risks the church from treading the path towards irrelevance.

GRACE THAT PRECEDES: RAHNER AND WESLEY CORRELATED

By Dick O. Eugenio, Ph.D.

Introduction

This essay responds to a challenge put forward by Colin W. Williams concerning the possibility of theological dialogue between Roman Catholic and Wesleyan theologians by looking mainly at John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace.¹ This challenge is meaningful only in light of the radical changes in Roman Catholic theology after Vatican II, when the Roman Catholic Church, dealing with religious pluralism, asserted the universality of grace and, therefore, of the universal possibility of salvation. However, the proposed dialogue presents a significant problem, for although Vatican II made such general affirmations, there are differences among its theologians in their understanding of the universality of grace. Therefore, it is better to single out one particular prominent Roman Catholic theologian and compare his views with Wesley. It seems prudent to choose Karl Rahner for this task, for three reasons: (1) he was a *peritus*, or among the few chosen theological experts-advisers of the Vatican II;² (2) his lectures in theology, later published as *Grundkurs des Glaubens*,³ became the official textbook for those pursuing clerical studies; and (3) he probably has the most well-developed theology of grace among his theological contemporaries.

¹ Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today: A Study of the Wesleyan Tradition in the Light of Current Theological Dialogue* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 46.

² George Vass argues that the Vatican II became Rahner's great motivation and new orientation in doing theology, in his article "The Future of Theology: Homage to Karl Rahner," *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004), 478.

³ This was later translated in English as *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1985).

Rahner on Nature and Grace

For Rahner, simply put, the human person is a graced being. This conviction is situated within his theological anthropology and religious epistemology, which in turn are guided by the instruments of transcendental Thomism. Basic in Rahner's epistemology is the conclusion that humanity is a transcendental knower, open to the Infinite and the "Holy Mystery," God.⁴ The title of his published doctoral thesis, *Geist in Welt*, referring to the nature of humanity, reveals this. By naming the human person as *Geist*, Rahner meant to argue that humans are "a power which reaches out beyond the world, and knows the metaphysical."⁵ In short, "spirit is transcendence"⁶ because an unlimited openness towards the infinity of God is what makes humans human. One of the pieces of evidence of this openness is humanity's infinite questioning of nature.

Man is essentially a questioner; indeed, he is an absolute question which does not stop at any given point. An objective curiosity is part of his nature, for a person is endowed, even before he begins to ask questions, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is rooted in the center of his personal being. He is given the capacity to ask for infinity and to lay himself open to the infinity of God.⁷

If the human person is a spirit that necessarily questions and anticipates answers and knowledge out of the questioning act, it is also necessarily true that he or she is existentially enabled to hear and understand the knowledge that may be

⁴ Karl Rahner preferred to call God "Holy Mystery" – "in the fact that we experience it as that which cannot be encompassed by a pre-apprehension which reaches beyond it, and hence it cannot be defined." See *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 57-61, 65. Charles Wood's article "Karl Rahner on Theological Discourse" is very illuminating in relation to the subject of God's incomprehensibility. According to him, for Rahner, the task or perhaps the limitation of theological discourse or of theologizing is to make sure that it refers to God without implying that God is thereby mastered or encompassed by the discourse, in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12 (2006), 55-67.

⁵ Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), liii. This is primarily a book on Rahner's epistemology, and his attempt to explore more fully Aquinas' enquiry into the possibility of knowing the incorporeal in Aquinas's "Question 84, Article 7: Whether the Intellect Can Actually Understand through the Intelligible Species of Which It is Possessed, Without Turning to the Phantasms?" in *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1: *Questions 1-119* (Westminster, Md., 1948), 429-430.

⁶ Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," in *More Recent Writings*, vol. 4 of *Theological Investigations*, trans. Kevin Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 42 [hereafter *TI* followed by the volume number].

⁷ Rahner, "The Foundation of Belief Today," in *TI* 16: 9; and *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 24.

communicated to him or her. For this reason, Rahner argued that the spirit must also be a hearer, a conclusion he postulated in his second major philosophical work, *Hörer des Wortes*.⁸

Extrinsicism and Intrinsicism

Rahner's radical optimism concerning the possibility of human reception of revelation and experience of God, although grounded in the spirit of the modern agenda set forth by Descartes' "return to the subject" and Kant's transcendental subject, is fuelled by his theology of grace.⁹ An understanding of his historical-theological setting would give light to this discussion.¹⁰ Rahner led the way in criticizing Neo-Scholasticism, the dominant Catholic intellectual and ecclesiastical movement before Vatican II, which asserted a dualistic perception of nature and grace. The question was whether grace is intimately, and even intrinsically, bound up with nature. If yes, then this intimate relationship implies a partnership between the ordinary and extraordinary, which threatened the gratuity of grace. So, how could grace be truly grace if it were already bound up with nature, whether in the form of an innate capacity or a natural disposition? Neo-Scholastic theologians opted to establish the difference between nature and grace to respond to the threat posed by the question.¹¹

⁸ Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 392. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1, Q. 12, Art. 2, pp. 49-50; and Q. 88, Art. 2, p. 450. See also Douglas R. Kull, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Revelation: A View from the Philippines," Ph.D. diss. (Ateneo de Manila University, 1977), 161-171, for his discussion of the transcendental method in *Hearers of the Word* by answering the question: "What are the conditions of the possibility of knowing the Christian mystery of revelation?"

⁹ In fact, as Rahner cautioned, while theological anthropology is anthropological, it is also theological. "Theological anthropology," Rahner wrote, "is only truly anthropological when it really sees itself as theology and loses itself in that," in "The Theological Dimension of the Question About Man," in *TI* 17: 61. Moreover, Rahner's understanding of the human person is a reaction against modern human existence apparently devoid of any notion of God or religion. "The man of today is never merely a man of today," he argues. Rather, Rahner recognized the human person as a *homo religiosus* with a religious *telos*, in "The Man of Today and Religion," in *TI* 6: 3.

¹⁰ See Rahner, *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 115-124. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, vol. 4 of *The Church Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago U. Press, 1984), 374-385, for another presentation, comparison, and synthesis of the understanding of grace of various Catholic and Protestant theologians.

¹¹ R. R. Reno, *The Ordinary Transformed: Karl Rahner and the Christian Vision of Transcendence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 92. For a historical discussion, particularly in relationship to Neo-Scholasticism, see Rahner, *Nature and Grace, and Other Essays*, trans. Dinah Wharton (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 4-11. The question of the relationship between nature and grace can also be a question between spirit and matter in the human person. This is because the human person is composed of both matter and spirit, or is a "material spirit." For Rahner's own discussion

For Rahner, the Neo-Scholastic position was not satisfactory. The movement's framework forced the analysis of grace into a place in which humanity's "ordination to the supernatural end can only consist in a divine decree still external to man," a position which for him was "quite unintelligible."¹² Rahner argued that this stance suffered from *extrinsicism*, a position which, instead of establishing the relationship of nature and grace, divorced them. It proposed that "man is in fact a closed, self-contained and finished system, which he can work out in his 'natural' existence, while grace is a sort of pure superstructure imposed on it."¹³ It also implied that this divine will imposed from outside leaves nature unaltered. As a result, nature experiences itself as pure nature whether or not God destines it towards the supernatural and whether or not the human receiver freely accepts this offered grace. Nature and grace are conceived as two layers, utterly independent of one another and existing alongside one another. Then, the human person has a double determination juxtaposed alongside one another: one secular and one supernatural.

The other side of the theological camp was a response postulated by *la nouvelle theologie*. As a direct reaction to Neo-Scholasticism, they thought that grace is intrinsic to the human person's ontological being and not something that was or is added later in a person's life. Equating the experience of grace with the experience of the Spirit, "[the] experience of the Spirit begins at the innermost core of our existence . . . it does not mean an encounter with any kind of object that confronts us from without."¹⁴ Grace is an ontological and existential structure of being human since the human person is destined and oriented towards the supernatural. In a way, Rahner's view concerning the nature-grace debate finds greater affinity towards this position. His essay "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," however, provides evidence that he stepped back from *la nouvelle theologie's* proposition, which he considered as another extreme. Rahner raised the same concern which was at the heart of Neo-Scholasticism: "The problem is this: is it still possible to conceive of grace as unexacted, supposing that the existential consisting of the inner and unconditional reference to grace and beatific vision were a constituent of man's 'nature' in the sense that man as such

concerning this relationship, see *Hominization: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 46-61; "Unity Between Spirit and Matter in Christian Faith," in *TI* 6: 153-177; and "Immanent and Transcendent Consummation of the World," in *TI* 10: 284-289.

¹² Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," in *TI* 1: 302. For an elaborate presentation, see Carmichael C. Peters, *A Gadamerian Reading of Karl Rahner's Theology of Grace and Freedom* (Lanham, Md.: Catholic Scholar's Press, 2000), 321-325.

¹³ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *TI* 4: 173.

¹⁴ Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church* (London: Burns and Oates, 1979), 4.

could not be thought without it?”¹⁵ Rahner responded, “No,” because the giftedness of grace requires a separation of nature from grace. In short, Rahner’s concern was the same as the Neo-Scholastics, that is, that grace should remain a gift, not something which humanity has in and of itself apart from the divine offering. Therefore, the only way to give adequate expression to the unexacted quality of grace is to preserve the essential and radical distinction between nature and the supernatural.¹⁶

For Rahner, both Neo-Scholasticism and *la nouvelle theologie* represented unacceptable extreme options: the former radically separated grace from nature while the latter made the two almost identical. Rahner’s alternative was to redefine the status of grace in the grace-nature relation. Rahner defused nature as the central category of theological analysis by relegating it to the level of a “remainder concept.”¹⁷ Instead of beginning with the concept of nature, grace must be the point of departure for any theological account of nature. To understand humanity’s experiences of the ordinary, one must begin with the clarity of the extraordinary. Rahner wrote: “A precise delimitation of nature from grace... and so a really pure concept of pure nature could thus in every case be pursued with the help of Revelation, which tells us that what in us is grace and so provides us with the means of abstracting this grace from the body of our existential experience of man and thus, of acquiring pure nature (in its totality) as a ‘remainder.’” Nature, then, is a “remainder concept... which remains in man when the supernatural existential as unexacted is subtracted.”¹⁸

Supernatural Existential

Rahner asserted that God’s eternal and primary decree to communicate Himself to humanity does not remain purely an intention of God, binding the human person to tend towards its supernatural end and causing no change in humanity’s ontological setup.¹⁹ *Au contraire*, the divine will must have an attained form within the human person as a real determination of its being. Therefore, the human person’s orientation to supernatural grace is not merely juridical that leaves the human person’s being unaffected, but rather is “a real ontological existential of

¹⁵ Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace,” in *TI* 1: 304.

¹⁶ Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,” in *TI* 4: 66; “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,” in *TI* 1: 325-46; and Reno, *The Ordinary Transformed*, 106-107.

¹⁷ See Reno’s analysis in *The Ordinary Transformed*, 106-107.

¹⁸ Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace,” in *TI* 1: 308.

¹⁹ Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” in *TI* 4: 173; “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,” in *TI* 1: 324-325.

man, which qualifies him really and intrinsically.”²⁰ Rahner called this ontological element that corresponds with humanity’s supernatural end as the *supernatural existential*.²¹ Grace calls for a corresponding interior factor in the spiritual creature as the condition of its own possibility.²² In *Sacramentum Mundi*, Rahner explained that supernatural existential means that

All men permanently stand under the offer of grace really operative in them. This permanent and ever-present offer is always accepted in their moral activity, unless they shut themselves to it by their own moral guilt. Through the supernatural formal object [God] which is involved in grace itself, the primary feature of revelation, and therefore the possibility of faith, is already present. That man is really affected by the permanent offer of grace is not something that happens only now and again. It is a permanent and inescapable human situation.²³

Rahner’s assertion is essential because God’s Self-communication would be meaningless if its reception were not marked by an enduring ontological existential in the spiritual subject. Because of the supernatural order of grace which inwardly affects and attains from within, the human person is interiorly different from what can be called “pure nature.” The supposed natural dynamism experienced by the human person towards God cannot simply be ascribed to the human person’s nature without any admixture of the supernatural. Grace is always already at work in human experience, although the light of reason cannot clearly distinguish it

²⁰ Rahner, “The Theological Concept of *Concupiscentia*,” in *TI* 1: 376.

²¹ See also an illuminating article by David Coffey, “The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004), 95-118. John F. Perry argues that Rahner was not the first to formulate the idea of the supernatural existential among Roman Catholic theologians, but that some 350 years before him, three theologians from the University of Salamanca already thought of it: Andreas de Vega (1498-1549), Domingo de Soto (1494-1560), and Juan Martinez de Ripalda (1594-1648). Of the three, argues Perry, Ripalda had the strongest influence upon Rahner. See “Juan Martinez de Ripalda and Karl Rahner’s Supernatural Existential,” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998), 442-456.

²² Rahner, “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,” in *TI* 1: 343. See Rahner’s lengthy discussion of the supernatural existential as an interior determination of the human person in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 126-133. See also Anton Losinger and Daniel O. Dahlstrom’s short discussion of the relationship between grace and the supernatural existential in *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Fordham, NY: Fordham U. Press, 2000), 36-38.

²³ Rahner, “Supernatural Existential,” in *Contrition-Grace and Freedom*, vol. 2 of *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, eds. Karl Rahner, et al (New York: Crossroad, 1968), 306. See also Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, eds., *A Dictionary of Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 161.

until it is revealed through explicit revelation from without.²⁴ In the economy of salvation, the human person is exposed to the influence of the divine, supernatural grace, which offers an interior union with God and through which God communicates Himself, whether the individual takes up an attitude of acceptance or refusal towards this grace.

Therefore, human existence is basically a life surrounded by God's love and a life placed in a situation of interior supernatural ordination towards God. It is called "existential" because it is a reality of the concrete human condition, an ontological element before the human person's act of accepting or rejecting the offer of God's Self-communication. This existential, however, is supernatural because it is a miracle of divine love surpassing all human calculation and expectation. The supernatural existential is "an implicit and *a priori* transcendental"²⁵ or is "the *a priori* horizon of all man's spiritual activities"²⁶ which constitutes "man's fundamental subjective disposition"²⁷ and "*a priori* capacity for revelation and faith."²⁸

Though it is free and unmerited, this supernatural ordination towards God is a permanent existential, not just given sparingly or intermittently. It is not a mere occasional, capricious intervention of God but is permanently offered to human freedom. There is, therefore, never a moment in the life of the human existent when God's offer of Himself and the capacity to receive it through grace is absent. For Rahner, "No human experience can be divested from the supernatural existential component so as to arrive at the purely natural dynamism."²⁹ Rahner further reinforces this by attributing the entire work of salvation to God's sole initiative. He explained: "The acceptance of grace needs to be sustained by God just as the gift of grace is... The self-communication as such effects its own acceptance, so that the actual and proximate ability to accept is the sheerest grace."³⁰ By implication, that grace is an existential of the human person logically entails that even nonbelievers-sinners possess this ontological existential, which persists even in their state of alienation. Precisely because it is a gift, it becomes reasonable to use it as a gift, in contrast to construing it as a human capacity. The supernatural

²⁴ Rahner, "Experience of Transcendence from the Standpoint of Catholic Dogmatics," in *TI* 18: 181. See his rejection of the proposition that the human person is composed of pure nature in "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace", in *TI* 1: 303.

²⁵ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *TI* 4: 170.

²⁶ Rahner, "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions," in *TI* 5: 131.

²⁷ See Rahner's article on "Revelation" in *Sacramentum Mundi* 5: 350.

²⁸ Rahner, *Sacramentum Mundi* 5: 354; and "Religious Enthusiasm and the Experience of Grace," in *TI* 16: 40.

²⁹ Rahner, "Religious Enthusiasm and the Experience of Grace," in *TI* 16: 40.

³⁰ Rahner, *A Dictionary of Theology*, 193.

existential is God himself working in depraved humanity, not the human person working towards God.

Wesley's Prevenient Grace Compared

For a Wesley scholar, the similarity between Rahner's understanding of graced humanity and Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace is already apparent. Both were concerned with (1) grace that precedes salvation and (2) grace that makes universal salvation possible. Both believed that grace, as God's initiative, is already at work in the human person before salvation. Like Wesley, Rahner taught that salvation and the ability to respond to God are of supernatural origin and cannot be considered an innate human capacity. Unlike Wesley, however, who categorized grace into three succeeding types (prevenient, convincing, and sanctifying), Rahner considered grace in general terms as the work of God in humanity.³¹

However, this apparent agreement between Rahner and Wesley on the factuality and significance of preceding grace must not be considered only at the surface level. That God's grace is at work prior to salvation has several implications to other theological aspects, and this will now be further examined. With this, we can discern more fully the similarities and divergences between Rahner and Wesley. It can be immediately recognized that where differences arise, it is Wesley's emphasis on the reality of sin and its effects that marks the distinguishing point.

On the Modern "Turn to the Subject"

Rahner's understanding of graced humanity is best understood when placed within the philosophical tradition it presupposes. His theology of grace is inseparable from his theological anthropology, which draws insights from modern philosophy, particularly concerning the knowing subject begun by Descartes' *res*

³¹ John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in Albert C. Outler, ed. *Sermons III*, 71-114, vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, 1986), 203-204 [Henceforth, all references from the Bicentennial Edition will be abbreviated *BE Works*]. Rahner's understanding of preceding grace is an apologetic response to Vatican II's declaration of the universal possibility of salvation. Albert Outler argues that there are two uses of prevenient grace in Wesley's writings: narrow and broad. The former refers to all the works of grace before justifying and sanctifying grace, and the latter refers to all grace as God's prior activity, as well as human response in all grace. See "John Wesley's Interests in the Early Fathers on the Church," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, eds. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 105. This is also discussed in Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 40.

cogitans and Kant's transcendental subject.³² (Both are part of the larger "turn to the subject" methodology found in modern transcendental philosophy where "it is the inquiring subject which has become the subject of inquiry.")³³ Characteristic of this approach is optimism in the human knower's rational capability. In epistemology, for instance, this position holds that for the reception of knowledge to be possible, the reception-ability of the human knower must be presupposed.

It is interesting to note that although Rahner and Wesley responded to the modern view of humanity differently, both upheld the work of preceding grace in the human person. Rahner followed and employed modern philosophy in his doctrine of grace. While he understood the goodness in humanity as of supernatural origin, it also emerged from his philosophical orientation. Rahner's theological anthropology, therefore, was an explanatory apologetic of his philosophical anthropology. He first presupposed the dignity of humanity, then explained this condition through the doctrine of grace. This approach is different from Wesley's. Whereas Rahner favored "the modern man," Wesley reacted negatively against it. In his sermon "Original Sin," Wesley staunchly criticized the whole historical development and upholding of what he called "gay descriptions of the dignity of man."³⁴ He considered these anthropological claims false on biblical and theological grounds. As we shall see, the significant differences between Rahner and Wesley are found in the latter's appropriation of the doctrine of original sin, which the former seems to have dismissed altogether. Contrary to Rahner, Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace is God's provision to totally depraved and incapacitated humanity. Wesley first presupposed the helpless

³² This tradition is followed through by its further development in the classical German philosophical tradition to Heidegger. See Kevin Hogan, "Entering Into Otherness: The Post-Modern Critique of the Subject and Karl Rahner's Theological Anthropology," *Horizons* 25 (2006), 183.

³³ Dych, "Theology in a New Key," in ed. Leo O'Donovan, *A World of Grace: An Introduction of the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 8-9. See also Dych's another article with the same theme, "Method of Theology According to Karl Rahner," in ed. William J. Kelley, *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner* (Milwaukee: Marquette U. Press, 1980), 39-53. For a good background of modern philosophy's "turn to the subject" methodology in relationship to Rahner's, see Hogan, "Entering into Otherness," 181-202. After comparing Rahner's approach, Hogan argued that Rahner's "turn to the subject" avoided the dissolution of the subject as well as those of post-Cartesian modernity, and provided a theological alternative for both. Losinger particularly noted the influences of the philosophical restructuring initiated by Descartes and Kant in Rahner's transcendental approach, in *The Anthropological Turn*, xvix-xxii. Losinger dealt with the "turn to the subject" subject more elaborately in pp. 59-67.

³⁴ Wesley, *BE Works* 2: 172. See Kenneth J. Collins, *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1989), 20-21; and Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 35.

condition of humanity, then explained the possibility of salvation through God's gift of grace.³⁵

On Nature and Grace

It needs to be noted that both Rahner and Wesley taught that there is no such thing as "pure nature" or "natural man." Notice the similarity between the following two quotations. First, from Rahner:

All men permanently stand under the offer of grace really operative in them. This permanent and ever-present offer is always accepted in their moral activity, unless they shut themselves to it by their own moral guilt. Through the supernatural formal object [God] which is involved in grace itself, the primary feature of revelation, and therefore the possibility of faith, is already present. That man is really affected by the permanent offer of grace is not something that happens only now and again. It is a permanent and inescapable human situation.³⁶

Then, from Wesley:

All the souls of men are dead in sin by *nature* . . . [but] there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called 'natural conscience'. But this is not natural; it is more properly called 'preventing grace'. Every man has a greater or less measure of this Everyone has some measure of that light, some glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world.³⁷

Although elsewhere Wesley described depraved humanity "in his natural state" as "unassisted by the grace of God,"³⁸ the quotation from Wesley above qualifies his position that for him, in reality, there is no such person completely

³⁵ J. Kenneth Grider concluded that this is characteristic of Arminianism, in *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1994), 351-353.

³⁶ Rahner, "Supernatural Existential," in *Sacramentum Mundi* 2: 306; *A Dictionary of Theology*, 161.

³⁷ Wesley, *BE Works* 3: 207.

³⁸ Wesley, *BE Works* 2: 176.

devoid of God's grace. The difference, however, lies again in Rahner's philosophical speculation, in contrast to Wesley's theological realism. Rahner viewed the relationship between nature and grace from an existential perspective. For him, grace is not an afterthought or extrinsic stuff infused upon humanity at some point. Instead, he argued that grace is an existential of being human, a *sine qua non* for humanity to be what it is. Also, as indicated earlier, Rahner regarded grace as the primary human existential, relegating nature as a remainder concept, implying, in Aristotelian terms, that grace is the *substance* of humanity; nature is but an *accident*. In contrast, Wesley nowhere argued that grace is the primary basis of human existence.³⁹ Instead, as a typical Augustinian theologian, he regarded humanity's depraved state as the starting point and only then thought of grace as God's providential cure for an already prior condition.⁴⁰ In existential terms, the primary human existential is sin; and grace is the supernatural superimposed structure to negate it. Rahner would undoubtedly argue that Wesley's position belongs to the extrinsicist camp, a view which he vigorously rejected.

On the Knowledge of God

There is a striking similarity between Rahner and Wesley on the effect of prevenient grace on humanity's knowledge of God. Both believed that because of grace, there is in all people a basic awareness of God, his attributes, and moral laws. Wesley spoke of this in terms of "natural conscience," which "though in one sense it may be termed 'natural,' because it is found in all men, yet properly speaking it is not *natural*; but a supernatural gift of God, lying above all his natural endowments."⁴¹ Like Rahner, Wesley believed that this is "found in all nations; so that in some sense it may be said to every child of man."⁴² Rahner, however,

³⁹ Wesley's sermon "What is Man?" in *BE Works* 4: 19-27, does not, in any way, deal with the relationship between nature and grace. In fact, the sermon itself is theologically frustrating, not only because it is highly speculative, but it also does not provide important elements of a holistic theological anthropology.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, his sermons "The Image of God," in *BE Works* 4: 297-303; and "Original Sin," in *BE Works* 2: 185, where his famous dictum can be found: "Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin; therefore ye must be born again, born of God. By nature we are wholly corrupted; by grace ye shall be wholly renewed."

⁴¹ Wesley, *BE Works* 3: 482, 199-200. In his *ordo salutis*, Wesley included the work of prevenient grace as part of the salvific event: "If we take this in its utmost extent, it [salvation] will include all that is wrought in the soul by what is frequently termed 'natural conscience' but more properly, 'preventing grace', all the drawings of the Father, the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that light wherewith the Son of God enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world," in *BE Works* 2: 156.

⁴² Wesley, *BE Works* 3: 199. Equating the experience of the Spirit with unthematic knowledge, Rahner argued against any elitist understanding of the knowledge of God, in *The Spirit*

favored the Heideggerian term *Vorgriff* to express this universal fact. *Vorgriff* refers to the pre-apprehension of reality or the *a priori* presuppositions, which lay the foundation for further questioning and knowledge. The content of the *Vorgriff* is what Rahner referred to as “unthematic knowledge,” or the original and *a priori* knowledge that the human knower possesses in the first order of knowing. This implicit knowledge of God, as the terms suggest, is the pre-apprehension of reality which is an un verbalized, “unobjectivated experience of transcendence,”⁴³ and “the condition of the possibility of any knowledge... of the articulated, objective knowledge of the absolute.”⁴⁴

Out of this understanding, Rahner rejected the assumption that one has no knowledge of God except when one possesses knowledge in an articulate, verbalized way. If one lacks this systematic knowledge, one is presumed to know absolutely nothing about God.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Rahner cautioned that the unthematic knowledge of God does not render the historical revelation of Christianity superfluous. As Randy Maddox rightly noticed, Rahner distinguished between “the transcendental experience of God as Question and the presence of God in intimate

in the Church, 27-28. Jose Antunes da Silva related Rahner’s theory of the anonymous Christian with religious pluralism and praised Rahner for his inclusivistic position, in “Karl Rahner’s Theology: Its Influence on the Church’s Attitude,” *African Ecclesial Review* 39 (2006), 94-107. See also John Galvin, “An Invitation of Grace,” in ed. Leo J. O’Donovan, *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 70-73.

⁴³ Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,” in *TI* 4: 50.

⁴⁴ Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 391; *Hearers of the Word*, 171. See Emmanuel M. Lantin, *The Christian Mystery and Human Understanding: Karl Rahner as a Fundamental Theologian* (Manila: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1975), 35. See also Dych’s discussion of the pre-conceptual and unthematic knowledge of God, in “Method of Theology According to Karl Rahner,” 43-53. Coming out of the implicit or unthematic knowledge, is what Rahner called ‘thematic or explicit knowledge’, the second order of knowledge, or the knowledge that is already objectified, that is, already expressed in words and concepts. See “Religious Enthusiasm and Experience of Grace,” in *TI* 16: 40. Rahner also called this type of knowledge “primitive revelation.” See “Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions,” in *TI* 17: 42; and Rahner’s definition of this term in *Sacramentum Mundi* 5: 355-358.

⁴⁵ This is the reason why Rahner thought that there are anonymous Christians, people who have not verbally heard the thematized Word of God, but have an implicit knowledge of God. A very good exposition of this is Rahner’s “Anonymous and Explicit Faith,” in *TI* 16: 52-59; and “The Specific Character of the Christian Concept of God,” in *TI* 21: 186-187. See also Anita Roper, *The Anonymous Christian*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966); Maurice Boutin, “Anonymous Christianity: A Paradigm for Interreligious Encounter,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20 (1983), 602-629; Gavin D’Costa, “Karl Rahner’s Anonymous Christian – A Reappraisal,” *Modern Theology* 1 (1985), 131-148; and Robert J. Schreier, “The Anonymous Christian and Christology,” *Missiology* 6 (1978), 29-52. As to whether this unthematic knowledge is salvific and what it does to anonymous Christians, see Rahner, “The Christian Among Unbelieving Relations,” in *TI* 3: 355-372; and for a discussion on how non-Christian religions should be viewed in light of this thesis, see “Christianity and the non-Christian Religions,” in *TI* 5: 115-134; “Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church,” in *TI* 12: 161-178; and “Observations on the Problem of the Anonymous Christian,” in *TI* 14: 280-294.

proximity as Answer.”⁴⁶ In short, the non-reflective transcendental region of human consciousness still needs to be made into the objective-explicit formulation of the Christian message, where it finds its culmination and perfection. How this is achieved marks the difference between Rahner and Wesley. For Rahner, historical knowledge of God is gained from within the human knower itself, like what George Lindbeck called the liberal “experiential-expressivist” approach.⁴⁷ Wesley, on the contrary, noted that knowledge of essential doctrines, “those which relate to the eternal Son of God, and the Spirit of God,” can only be “brought to light by the gospel.”⁴⁸ Thus, for Wesley, real knowledge comes *a posteriori*, received from without and not explicitized from within.

On Freedom and Responsibility

It is because grace is at work and that humanity possesses knowledge of God and good and evil that humanity must, to a certain degree, be enabled, by grace, with the capacity to choose and do good. In short, freedom and responsibility are necessary consequences of preceding grace. Both Rahner and Wesley affirmed this. While Wesley’s account of post-lapsarian humanity pictured the loss of freedom, he understood prevenient grace to have restored a sufficient degree of freedom to respond to God’s saving grace.⁴⁹ This gift of freedom also explains the possibility of good deeds even among non-Christians.⁵⁰ Concomitant, however, of freedom is

⁴⁶ Maddox, “Karl Rahner’s Supernatural Existential,” *Evangelical Journal* 5 (1987), 4.

⁴⁷ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 16-17, 31-32.

⁴⁸ Wesley, *BE Works* 3: 200-201.

⁴⁹ See Wesley’s account of humanity’s lost freedom due to the Fall in *BE Works* 4: 295-299. See also Allan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate* (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987). To deny the gift of freedom and will, according to Wesley, is “the very edge of Calvinism,” which are found “(1) in ascribing all good to the free grace of God; (2) in denying all natural free-will, and all power antecedent to grace; and (3) in excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God.” See Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley Complete and Unabridged*, 14 vols, 3rd ed. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1978) 8: 285 [Henceforth, all references from this series will be abbreviated *Works*].

⁵⁰ Wesley, *BE Works* 3: 482. In his sermon “Free Grace,” Wesley emphasized that this grace is free: “It does not depend on any power or merit of man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in any wise depend on either on the good works of righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is. It does not depend on his endeavours. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all these flow from the grace of God. They are the streams only, not the fountain. They are the fruits of free grace, and not the root. They are not the cause, but the effects of it. Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it,” in *BE Works* 3: 545.

responsibility. Consequently, Wesley argued that non-Christians who do not have the opportunity to listen to the Gospel will be judged according to the light they had received and how they acted according to it.⁵¹

Rahner's understanding of freedom and responsibility resulting from God's grace is more developed than Wesley's. Influenced by his existential anthropology, Rahner argued that freedom and responsibility are necessary presuppositions for the human person as the hearer of the Word. However, Rahner thought that the essence of freedom is not the mere possibility of choosing. Instead, he considered freedom existentially, suggesting that it "is not merely a quality of an act such as it is sometimes performed, but a transcendental qualification of being human."⁵² Given that freedom is a gift from God, it is also necessarily freedom before and towards God. It was for this reason why Rahner thought that "salvation is achieved not only within the explicitly religious sphere but in *all* dimensions of human existence, even where man does not interpret his actions in a consciously religious way."⁵³ In this sense, humanity encounters God everywhere radically as the actual question put to his freedom in all things of this world, since in every free act, God is present, though not explicitly grasped, as its fundamental impulse and final goal.⁵⁴ However, the ultimate paradox is that while God is experienced in every free act, he can also be denied.

Since the human person becomes what it is by exercising its freedom, Rahner argued that the basic meaning of sin is the misuse of freedom because freedom implies an "inescapable responsibility for oneself."⁵⁵ Real freedom, for Rahner, "is always freedom with regard to salvation or damnation and cannot be freedom in any other way."⁵⁶ In the reality of everyday human existence, the human

⁵¹ Wesley, *Works* 8: 337. See also Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 45; and Maddox, "Karl Rahner's Supernatural Existential," 9.

⁵² Rahner, *Grace in Freedom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 211.

⁵³ Rahner, "Christian Humanism," in *TI* 9: 189; and "Institution and Freedom," in *TI* 13: 106.

⁵⁴ Rahner, *Grace in Freedom*, 206; "Experience of the Spirit and Existential Commitment," in *TI* 16: 25; "The Specific Character of the Christian Concept of God," in *TI* 21: 191-192; and "Experience of Transcendence from the Standpoint of Catholic Dogmatics," in *TI* 18: 186. See also Kull, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Revelation," 276-279.

⁵⁵ An excellent elaboration of this is Ron Highfield's "The Freedom to Say 'No': Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), 485-505; Rahner, "Christian Humanism," in *TI* 9: 188.

⁵⁶ Rahner, "History of the World and Salvation History," in *TI* 5: 98; "The Experiment with Man," in *TI* 9: 206; and "The Foundations of Belief Today," in *TI* 16: 13. Since the supernatural existential is a real ontological determination obliging the human person towards its supernatural destiny, "this ordination, even though an implicit and *a priori* transcendental, can be denied and repressed only at the cost of sin, because even then it is affirmed in every act of his spiritual existence" (Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *TI* 4: 170). The human person cannot reject its

person must act continually for eternity because every one of its decisions takes place under the horizon of God's concern. Both the sinful and the justified are responsible for their actions in life and, to this extent, are also free. This freedom, therefore, for Rahner, is a permanent constitutive part of human nature, for "without freedom man could not stand before God as a responsible agent, in dialogue and partnership with God; without it, he could not be the subject of guilt before God nor of proffered and accepted redemption and pardon."⁵⁷

On Salvation

As Maddox indicated, the substantial difference between Rahner and Wesley on the implications of prevenient grace can be found in their understanding of salvation as influenced by their presuppositions concerning the human condition. Wesley believed that the actual human condition is that which is affected by original sin. As Maddox concluded, the ontological human situation is that which is deprived of the immediate presence of God.⁵⁸ Prevenient grace, therefore, is God's initiative to draw himself near to fallen and alienated humanity. Rahner, because of his philosophical leanings, thought otherwise. For two reasons, Rahner viewed the actual human condition as that which is inescapably infused with the immediate presence of God: firstly, because he considered grace as the primary human existential, and secondly, because he seems to have dismissed sin as an ontological reality in humanity altogether.

Consequently, although both Rahner and Wesley believed that preceding grace effects a transformation in human lives, the transformation they speak of is entirely different. Maddox adds, "Prevenient grace [for Wesley] deals almost exclusively with the provision for the forgiving and reconciling work of grace in the lives of deprived human beings, while the supernatural existential focuses primarily on the necessary basis for the sanctifying or completing work of grace upon incomplete but already good human subjects."⁵⁹ For Rahner, the supernatural is a human existential, although experienced implicitly. The goal of salvation is to make

supernatural vocation towards intimate union with God without offending and hurting its own being and without remaining unscarred, for it can never escape the inner figure of its destiny imprinted by God as His image in the very depths of its being. See Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *TI* 6: 393. Rahner also pointed these same thoughts in "Theology of Freedom," in *TI* 6: 180.

⁵⁷ Rahner, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," in *TI* 2: 247.

⁵⁸ Maddox, "Karl Rahner's Supernatural Existential," 11; Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate*, 137.

⁵⁹ Maddox, "Karl Rahner's Supernatural Existential," 11.

such an implicit experience explicit and consciously appropriated.⁶⁰ For Wesley, sin is the primary condition whereby humanity is alienated from God. Salvation is precisely the cure for sin and humanity's reconciliation with God.

Conclusion

On the surface level, Rahner's supernatural existential and Wesley's prevenient grace offer a promising starting point for a dialogue between Roman Catholic and Wesleyan theologians. But as presented above, Wesleyan and evangelical theologians alike, who embrace the scriptural teaching of the corruption of sin, and the alienation from God, which it implies, would have significant questions and disagreements with Rahner's presuppositions and theology of grace in general. It is also apparent that the differences between Rahner and Wesley are influenced by the former's appropriation and importation of philosophical categories into his theology. The difference in agenda is also determinative. While both theologians explained the universal possibility of salvation through the doctrine of prevenient grace, Rahner focused more intently on defending Vatican II's attitude towards pluralistic inclusivism. As such, he was forced to argue that grace must be the primordial human existential present in every human person. Wesley's agenda, however, is more soteriological and missional, i.e., prevenient grace explains the first order in his *ordo salutis* while at the same time rebuffing the Calvinistic notion of limited atonement. So what is the way forward towards a fruitful theological dialogue? From a Wesleyan perspective, it seems that fundamental questions first need to be addressed and clarified: What is salvation? What is the actual human condition that needs to be saved? What do the Scriptures say? Only then can the dialogical green light be truly green.

⁶⁰ In line with Rahner's understanding of the knowledge of God, he believed that "the express revelation of the word of Christ is not something which comes to us from without as entirely unrelated and insignificant but is the explication of what we already are by grace and what we experience," in "Anonymous Christians," in *TI* 6: 394. Since this knowledge is unthematic, however, "it is liable to be overlooked in all specific experience," (Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church*, 6) and "its presence can be ignored in the face of the immediate phenomena which in their variety and particularity can fill the space of life and consciousness" (Rahner, 'The Hiddenness of God', in *TI* 16: 237; "Atheism and Implicit Christianity," in *TI* 9: 145-164). But it is still there, "already present in human existence, silent and hidden, as the infinite, supernatural, asymptotic goal of the spirit, conditioning everything, including the processes of the human spirit." See Rahner, "The Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *TI* 13: 123; and "Anonymous and Explicit Faith," in *TI* 16: 55.

BANDS OF HOLINESS

By Adonis Abelard O. Gorospe, Ph.D.

The Christian life is a journey of transformation from a self that is broken by sin to a self that is made whole by God. This whole self is our true self in Christ wherein we accomplish that which God intended us to be: to become like him as we live in intimate relationship with him. All of us are fellow pilgrims on the journey to our true self and we need one another as we walk in close relationship with God and with each other. In Asia, this manner of companionship is highly valued for Asians live out their lives in close community. In such a context, spiritual companionship becomes more effective and more acceptable when done in community. The Methodist band meetings furnish us with a workable model of doing spiritual companionship in community that lends itself well to the Asian context.

John Wesley's concept of the Methodist band meeting stems from his understanding of the integral connection between ideas, doctrines, churches, and people. Because he believed that God mediates his grace upon people who come together for religious conversations and interaction, he institutionalized this belief into his process of spiritual formation within the Methodist movement. One of the ways he did this was his method of forming people spiritually following the pattern set by religious orders in the Roman Catholic Church. The Benedictines, for instance, may have served as the precedent for *The General Rules of the United Societies* (1734). Wesley's *Rules* clearly show his commitment to turn Methodism into a disciplined religious order.¹ Harper also sees parallels between early Methodism and the Franciscans.²

The second way that Wesley used in the practice of spiritual formation that impacted his followers' spirituality and foster their connection to each other is the use of spiritual guidance. Owing to his training for Anglican priesthood, John Wesley is familiar with the concept of spiritual guidance and, according to Wesley's own account, he observed the spiritual guidance being practiced by both his parents. Thus, he included his own version of spiritual guidance into Methodism. Elements

¹ Steve Harper, *Prayer and Devotional Life of United Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 66-71.

² Harper, 70. Cf. James Logan, "Wesley and Francis: Two Evangelical Witnesses," *Circuit Rider*, November to December, 1982, (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 5-7.

of this understanding of spiritual guidance is evident during his service as curate in Wroot, his ministry among students as a Fellow at Lincoln College in Oxford University and his term as missionary in Georgia.³

In 1739, he began the Methodist movement by holding spiritual conversations with a small group of people.⁴ As the movement grew and it became difficult to properly care for the needs of those joining the movement, he employed a system of spiritual guidance which was most often done by the untrained lay leaders of societies, classes, and bands. He referred to this strategy as “watching over one another in love.” Wesley’s system focused not so much on techniques but on ^{the} commitment to care for each so that all may be able continue their spiritual journey with vitality and authenticity.⁵

In 1786, looking back over the decades spanning the growth of the Methodism from its beginnings in Oxford to the time when he wrote “Thoughts upon Methodism,” Wesley sketched out the elements that made Methodism such a vital religion, the abandonment of which by Methodists in his day is the reason for Methodism’s inevitable decline. These three elements he called the “doctrine, spirit, and discipline” of Methodism.⁶ The doctrine of Methodism was that “the Bible is the whole and sole truth both of Christian faith and practice,”⁷ and from the Bible, Methodists learned the doctrine of “salvation by faith, preceded by repentance, and followed by holiness.”⁸ “Holiness of heart and life” is the essence or “spirit” of Methodism, for which purpose all Methodists join together in order to attain “perfection” or “the great salvation.”⁹ To this end, Methodists “discipline” themselves to meet regularly in societies, classes, bands, and select societies; attend church and holy communion; and always began and ended their meetings with prayer.¹⁰ The strength of Methodism lies in it being a “plain, scriptural religion, fortified by a few providential guidelines.”¹¹ The problem, according to Wesley, is that religion makes people hardworking and frugal, and this in turn leads to increase

³ Harper, 74.

⁴ Harper, 74. See also *Works* 9:69. All references to the writings of John Wesley cited in scripture format as *Works* are taken from John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9, Ed. Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984).

⁵ Harper, 74.

⁶ Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works* 9:527; Also in Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, ed., *John Wesley on Methodism* (Lexington, Kentucky: Emeth Press, 2014), 231.

⁷ Wesley, “Thoughts,” in *Works* 9:527, and Kinghorn, 231.

⁸ Wesley, “Thoughts,” in *Works* 9:528, and Kinghorn, 233.

⁹ Wesley, “Thoughts,” in *Works* 9:529, and Kinghorn, 234.

¹⁰ Wesley, “Thoughts,” in *Works* 9:528-529, and Kinghorn, 232-234.

¹¹ Wesley, “Thoughts,” in *Works* 9:529, and Kinghorn, 234.

in wealth. The increase in wealth leads to “pride, anger, and the love of the world.” This in turn leads to a corresponding decrease in what makes Methodism a vital religion, i.e. its “doctrine, spirit, and discipline.”¹²

Wesley believed that holiness is essential to the life of every Christian.¹³ The reason, according to Wesley, why God raised Methodist preachers is “To reform the nation, and in particular the Church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”¹⁴ By holiness, Wesley meant, in all practical aspects, loving God and neighbor.¹⁵ The “General Rules” of Wesley were in fact practical guidelines to living a life of holiness, i.e. a life of loving God and one’s neighbor.¹⁶ Holiness and Christian perfection is, for Wesley, “the goal of the Christian life.”¹⁷

Diane Leclerc interprets Wesley’s understanding of holiness in two ways. First, it is a power over sin, or more accurately as Wesley expounded it, freedom from bondage to the power of sin.¹⁸ Second, it also means a change in character expressed through actions. Because of the grace of God at work within us, our actions will reflect the character that is being formed within us. In his work, “The Character of A Methodist,” Wesley lists these actions which Leclerc summarized as follows:

- Loves God with all his or her heart, soul, mind, and strength
- In everything give thanks
- Has a heart lifted to God at all times
- Loves every person as his or her own soul
- Is pure in heart
- Evidences that God reigns alone
- Keeps all the commandments
- Does all to the glory God

¹² Wesley, “Thoughts,” in *Works* 9:529-530, and Kinghorn, 234-235.

¹³ Kevin M. Watson, 39-40 41. Other scholars also discussed the importance of holiness for John Wesley. See footnote 1, p. 39.

¹⁴ John Wesley, “Minutes of Several Conversations between the Reverend Mr. John and Charles Wesley, and Others,” in *Works* 10:845, cited by Kevin M. Watson, 40.

¹⁵ Kevin M. Watson, 40, 41. See also John Wesley, “Almost Christian” (1784) in *Works* 1:137-139, and “Of the Church” in *Works* 3:55-56.

¹⁶ Kevin M. Watson, 41, also footnotes 13 and 14. For the Three “General Rules,” see “The Nature, Design, And General Rules of the United Societies” in *Works* 9:69-75. Wesley also refers to the “General Rules” in relation to christian perfection, see “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” in *Works*, Jackson, 11:433. All references to John Wesley’s writings cited in scripture format as *Works*, Jackson, refer to *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 Volumes, 3rd ed. 1872: rep. Grand, Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

¹⁷ Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric, *Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 11, cited in Kevin M. Watson, 43.

¹⁸ Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix, *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), 53.

- Adorns the doctrine of God in all things¹⁹

These actions reflect the character of Christ in us. It goes beyond simply imitating what Christ does. Rather, it is actually doing what Christ does because our character has become like that of Christ.²⁰ As the apostle Paul would describe it, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (English Standard Version, <http://www.esvbible.org/Galatians+2:20/>, accessed October 21, 2015) To live the holy life then is to live a life that is becoming and more like Christ and not, as we sometimes mistake it to be, growing according to our own standard of personal holiness.²¹

How is this holiness to be attained? It is done through the community faith.²² For Wesley, holiness is fundamentally social in character. Thus, he worked hard to build communal structures for spiritual formation that will support and foster the disciplined holy community that he envisioned.²³ He believed that all who are justified by faith and experienced new birth must join together to “watch over one another in love.”²⁴ This for him means the nurturing of believers in a Christian community, more particularly in the context of a small group, where all members are accountable to each other. In his biting criticism of the Mystics in his Preface to the 1739 edition of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Wesley affirmed that, different from the “solitary religion” of the Mystics, “the gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.” Wesley likens the practice of the solitary religion of the Mystics, or “holy solitaires” as he calls these, to holy adultery.²⁵ Watson seems to think that this particular attitude by Wesley is rooted in the latter’s Oxford Methodist experience.²⁶ It is an attitude that will persist more than two decades later.

¹⁹ Leclerc and Maddix, 54. See John Wesley, “The Character of A Methodist,” in *Works* 9:32-42.

²⁰ Leclerc and Maddix, 56-57.

²¹ Leclerc and Maddix, 61.

²² Goodhead, 159.

²³ Kevin M. Watson, 39

²⁴ Wesley, “General Rules,” in *Works* 9:69.cited by Kevin M. Watson, 43, footnote 27.

²⁵ Wesley, “Preface,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1739, in *Works*, Jackson, 14:319, cited by Kevin M. Watson, 44. Colón-Emeric’s comment on Wesley’s remark is worth noting: “No one can grow in the happiness announced in the Beatitudes without the company of others. Without friends and enemies we are deprived of neighbours to love; how then can one attain that holiness without which it is impossible see the Lord?”, Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection, 131. For the full quotation by Colón-Emeric and Watson’s own comment concerning it, see footnote 33 in Kevin M. Watson, 44.

²⁶ Kevin M. Watson, 45.

In an entry to his *Journal* (August 25, 1763), Wesley evaluates the ministry of preaching done in Pembrokeshire over the past twenty years:

I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, in only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire! But no *regular societies*, no discipline, no order or connections. And the consequence is that nine out of ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever.²⁷

Twenty-five years after his stinging evaluation of the work at Pembrokeshire, Wesley wrote to Edward Jackson concerning the need for Methodist bands to meet and for discipline to be maintained in order for believers to grow in faith:

You do well likewise to exhort all the believers that are in earnest or *would be* in earnest to meet in band. But the bands in every place need continual instruction; for they are continually flying in pieces.²⁸

Kevin Watson believed that, even though Wesley found the band system difficult to maintain, Wesley still advocated for the preservation of band meetings as well as society and class meetings because the use of such communal structures, and more particularly small group structures, will lead to the growth of holiness and faith in the lives of believers.²⁹

The most helpful layer of communal engagement for developing social holiness, however, as far as Wesley is concerned, is the Methodist band.³⁰ The “Rules of the Band Societies” and the “Directions given to the Band Societies” were designed to help Methodist achieve Christian perfection.³¹ A perusal of Wesley’s

²⁷ Wesley, *Journal*, August 25, 1763, in *Works*, 21:424 (emphasis original), cited by Kevin M. Watson, 45. In other *Journal* entries, Wesley shared how the absence of band meetings led to a lack of revival and how the presence of band meetings revitalised the spiritual life of believers (April 20, 1769 in *Works* 22:180; January 14, 1782 in *Works* 23:229 and January 30, 1761 in *Works* 21:301), see footnote 36.

²⁸ Wesley, Letter to Edward Jackson, October 24, 1788, in *Letters* (Telford), 8:98-99 (emphasis original) cited in Kevin M. Watson, 46. for the full quote, see footnote 37. All citations to Wesley’s letters in scripture format and cited as *Letters* (Telford) are taken from *The Letters of John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London:Epworth Press, 1931). There were other letters of Wesley written to John Mason, dated November 3, 1784 in *Letters* (Telford) 7:247, and William Simpson, dated April 26, 1788 in *Letters* (Telford) 8:57, urging them to meet in bands, see footnote 38, p. 47.

²⁹ Kevin M. Watson, 47.

³⁰ Kevin M. Watson, 62-63.

³¹ Goodhead, 158, 159.

“Rules of the Band societies” clearly shows why Wesley thinks this way.³² The purpose of band meetings is to obey God’s command in James 5:16, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” (King James Version) The program of activities for accomplishing this purpose is to meet at least once a week wherein each session follows a prescribed format:

- Begin exactly on time with “singing or prayer”
- Each one will speak “freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt, since our last meeting.” The order to be followed in this mutual confession of faults seems to be that the *Leader*,³³ will “speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.” At least four searching questions were recommended:³⁴
 1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
 2. What temptations have you met with?
 3. How were you delivered?
 4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
- Presumably when all have finished confessing the true state of their own souls, the meeting will end in prayer.³⁵

Before joining a Methodist band, one must follow a set of prerequisites specified in a series of eleven questions. Kevin M. Watson grouped these eleven questions into two sets. The first set of five questions relate to a person’s spiritual condition. That person must have experienced forgiveness of sins, “peace with God” through Jesus Christ, the Spirit’s witness concerning that person being a “child of

³² See See Kevin M. Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, Appendix C, 208-209. Also, Appendix A of this work.

³³ Wesley, “Plain Account,” in *Works* 9:267 (emphasis in the original).

³⁴ There is a fifth question: “Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?” But this is found only in early editions. The question was dropped from later editions beginning 1779 or 1780, see *Works* 9:78, footnotes 8 and 12..

³⁵ The format of the band meeting is roughly similar to that recommended for a group spiritual direction session by Rose Mary Dougherty in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 11-14, with the exclusion of a concluding group reflection activity and the time for silence after each person has shared. Also, the group spiritual direction meeting format recommended by Dougherty does not allow opportunity for the asking of searching questions recommended by Wesley for band meetings.

God,” and the “love of God shed abroad” in that person’s heart, Also, the question is asked whether in that person’s life, sin, both “inward or outward,” has any control. The second set of six questions relate to a person’s willingness to speak whatever is in that person’s heart “without exception, without disguise, and without reserve” as well as “desire to be told of all” that person’s “faults, and that plain and home” by the other band members.³⁶

Wesley’s vision is that the class meeting, where one finds justification by faith,³⁷ becomes an entry point into a deeper unity of spirit, a greater honesty in sharing what is in their hearts “without reserve”, and a closer companioning on the journey toward holiness in life that the band meeting provides.³⁸ The band is a smaller in size than a class,³⁹ its subdivision is by gender and marital status, and each single men band, single women band, married men band, and married women band meets once a week at different days from the other types of bands to provide the opportunity for greater honesty and more effective meeting of needs. The men bands for example met on Wednesdays and the women bands met on Sundays. Also, every quarter, all the men involved in bands meet together on one evening, the women on the second evening, and both men and women on the third evening in order to celebrate the love feast. and experience greater thankfulness of the “mercies” of God that they have received.⁴⁰

Bands attendance is not compulsory. The type of band meeting depend on gender and status.⁴¹ Band members usually number around five or six and not more than ten.⁴² Bands are concerned with the confession of specific sins.⁴³ Entry into a band requires one to be justified by faith, experienced new birth,⁴⁴ and possesses the

³⁶ Wesley, “Rules of the Band Societies,” *Works* 9:77-78. See also Kevin M. Watson’s explanation in *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 63-64.

³⁷ Wesley, “Plain Account,” *Works* 9:266-267, cited and explained by Kevin M. Watson, 64-65. See also Watson’s supporting reference to Thomas R. Albin, “Inwardly Persuaded: Religion the Heart in Early British Methodism,” in *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. Richard B. Steele (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 45.

³⁸ Wesley, “Plain Account,” *Works* 9:266-268.

³⁹ According to Wesley, the old English word, “band,” means “little company,” see “Plain Account,” in *Works* 9:267.

⁴⁰ Wesley, “Plain Account,” in *Works* 9:267. Also, Kevin M. Watson, 66.

⁴¹ Kevin M. Watson, 68.

⁴² Kevin M. Watson, 69, footnote 112.

⁴³ Wesley, “Rules of the Band Societies,” in *Works* 9:77.

⁴⁴ Note questions 1-5 in the list proposed by Wesley to be asked of prospective band members before they join, “Rules of the Band Societies,” in *Works* 9:77, and the introductory statement of “Directions given to the Band Societies,” in *Works* 9:79.

willingness to be involved in searching spiritual conversations about personal sins.⁴⁵ Band memberships are for serious believers, those who are “pressing after perfection.”⁴⁶ Hence, bands were further subdivided into “select bands, for those who had attained perfection,” and “penitent bands, for those who had slipped from the state of perfection.”⁴⁷

Wesley’s vision of spreading “scriptural holiness over the land” moves him to put much value the band meetings than in society or class meetings,⁴⁸ though all three structures are part of his method for growth in holiness. Each provides an opportunity for increasing levels of communal engagement in terms of time, watching each other’s spiritual welfare, and willingness of self-disclosure. Each thus provides critical communal support in the increasingly progressive stages of a person’s journey toward holiness.

Kevin M. Watson points to the conventicle system and the *collegia pietatis* developed by Jacob Spener as an important predecessor of the Methodist band system.⁴⁹ Though the connection to early Methodist band meetings may not be as direct, the system did contribute to the development Pietism in the European continent. This in turn influenced the development of both the Anglican Religious Societies and the Moravian *banden*. These two institutions gave rise to the practice of using small groups for the purpose of nurturing holiness in committed disciples.⁵⁰

The growth in number of the *collegia pietatis* influenced Pietism in the European continent at the time that Anthony Horneck returned to Germany in 1670. When Horneck organized his Religious Societies in either 1678 or 1679, the influence of Continental Pietism was clearly evident. Scott Kisker would argue that the origin for the idea of a religious society was not clear in Horneck’s mind⁵¹ and that other scholars would attest to the influence of the conventicles of English dissent and nonconformity on the development of the Religious Societies.⁵² Watson, however, gives three reasons why he believes that Continental Pietism directly

⁴⁵ Note questions 6-11 in the list proposed by Wesley to be asked of prospective band members before they join, “Rules of the Band Societies,” in *Works* 9:78.

⁴⁶ Goodhead, 159.

⁴⁷ Goodhead, 159.

⁴⁸ Kevin M. Watson, 70.

⁴⁹ Kevin M. Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness: The Band Meeting in Wesley’s Thought and Popular Methodist Practice* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17, 22.

⁵⁰ Kevin M. Watson, 19-20. The conduct of *collegia pietatis* meetings differ from band meetings in that collegia members read Scripture and discuss it which band members don’t, and that *collegia* members do not do communal confession of sins which band members do. See Kevin M. Watson, 19.

⁵¹ Kevin M. Watson, 20.

⁵² Kevin M. Watson, 20. See footnote 17.

influenced the development of the Anglican Religious Societies. First of all, even Kisker believes Horneck to be the transition figure between Pietism and Anglicanism. Second, the rules of the Societies demonstrate a truly Anglican brand of Pietism. Third, the Societies clearly decided to remain within the established church,⁵³ a "radical innovation" in Anglicanism at that time despite showing that the Societies are truly Anglican.⁵⁴

The purpose of Religious Societies was the encouragement of "practical holiness" by means of a "disciplined practice of the means of grace"⁵⁵ The rules of the Societies guide its members to achieve this end in a more intentional way than the *collegia pietatis* which seeks to achieve the same purpose through "fraternal admonition and chastisement."⁵⁶ In "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies," a foundational document of early Methodism, one may clearly see the influence of Religious Societies on John Wesley's organization of his movement.⁵⁷

The revival at Herrnhut in 1727 led to the organization of the Moravian community into *Banden* or bands and *Chor* or choir. The *Banden* were voluntary small groups organised into gender and marital status. Created in July 9, 1727, they practiced strict mutual examination which fostered intimacy and openness, a key to their successful existence.⁵⁸ Colin Podmore describes the conduct these *Banden* meetings as:

marked by total frankness on the part both of the member describing the state of his soul and of his fellow members in their criticism of him. Thus thus they had something of the function of the confessional and anticipated to some degree modern 'group therapy'.⁵⁹

Count Nikolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) gives a fuller description as well as the purpose of this mutual examinations:

The we meet with each other, that we confess one to another the state of the heart and diverse imperfections, is not done in order to consult

⁵³ Kevin M. Watson, 20.

⁵⁴ Kevin M. Watson, 21.

⁵⁵ .Kevin M. Watson, 21-22. See footnote 21, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Kevin M. Watson, 22.

⁵⁷ Kevin M. Watson, 22.

⁵⁸ Kevin M. Watson, 23-24.

⁵⁹ Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998), 31, cited by Kevin M. Watson, 24. See also footnote 30, p. 23.

with our brothers and sisters because we could not get along without the counsel of a brother or sister. Rather it is done that one may see the rightness of heart. By that we learn to trust one another; ...talk to each other, ...unburden your hearts, so that you can constantly rely on each other.⁶⁰

Kevin M. Watson explains that the purpose of the *Banden* was mutual transparency, with each *Banden* member mirroring the other members' lives, thus helping them discern the real state of their spiritual walk with God.⁶¹

In 1731, classes, organised according to a hierarchy of levels in spiritual maturity, began to appear. Some of these classes replaced the bands of married men and later replaced the bands altogether, though band formation continued to be part of the Moravian missionary strategy.⁶² A further development was the organization of the Moravian community into *Chor* or choirs. The purpose of the *Chor* was "greater spiritual fellowship." This purpose was achieved through obligatory permanent mutual living arrangement by gender which facilitated fuller religious participation.⁶³

Of all the units of Moravian organization, the *Banden* would be the closest forerunner of the Methodist band system. This was also the form of Moravian community that Wesley was most familiar with. This was perhaps why Wesley adopted the use of the name for his own organization. Wesley also followed the *Banden* practice of meeting in small groups for the purpose of mutual accountability as well as organising the groups according to gender and marital status.⁶⁴

Aside from the Anglican Religious Societies and the Methodist *Banden*, the development of early Methodist bands was also influenced by what Wesley called "the first rise of Methodism"⁶⁵ in Oxford. In November of 1729, four students, among them the brothers John and Charles Wesley, met together occasionally for "study, prayer, and religious conversation, attending the Sacrament regularly" and "keeping track of their lives by daily notations in a diary."⁶⁶ There was no regular meeting times nor a formal structure. These developed later in 1730 together with a more socially focused ministry among the prisoners and the poor of Oxford, the latter

⁶⁰ Kevin M. Watson, 24. for the full original German quotation, see footnote 38, p. 24.

⁶¹ Kevin M. Watson, 24.

⁶² Kevin M. Watson, 25-26.

⁶³ Kevin M. Watson, 26-27.

⁶⁴ Kevin M. Watson, 27.

⁶⁵ Kevin M. Watson, 28. See also John Wesley's "Short History" in *Works* 9:430.

⁶⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, "The Quest of the First Methodist: Oxford Methodism Reconsidered," in *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Kingwood Books, 1989), 71, cited by Kevin M. Watson, 28.

development making the group more notorious.⁶⁷ The little group met together, not in response to revival which is the case at Herrnhut, but in order to find assurance of their own salvation through the deepening their holiness and increasing their love for God and neighbor.⁶⁸ They pursued this objective in a very disciplined manner, particularly in the way they use their time. They were so strict in the way they avoided wasting time that they were accused of laying a burden on themselves that was too heavy for anyone else to bear. Anyone wanting to join their group did so voluntarily.⁶⁹ The only requirement for membership was “the desire to work out one’s salvation and to engage in the pursuit perfection.”⁷⁰ Their main activities were scholarship, devotion and social outreach. Their approach to devotion has bearing on the conduct of Methodist band meetings. Mutual confession of sins through the comparison of personal diaries and pointing out the faults of one another is an important of their group meeting experience. They engaged in probing religious conversations concerning each one’s progress in living a holy life. The intent of these conversations is “mutual edification” and their pursuit of this end led them to meet more than once a week.⁷¹ The guidelines for these spiritual conversations were intentions of Samuel Wesley’s Religious Society at Epworth in 1701. These were: “First to pray to God; Secondly, to read the Holy Scriptures, and to discourse upon Religious Matters for their mutual Edification; and Thirdly, to deliberate about the Edification of our neighbor, and the promoting it.”⁷² Thus, it can be said that the Oxford Methodists informally borrowed the principles and structures of Samuel Wesley’s Religious Society at Epworth. Since John Wesley was the leader of the Oxford small group of Methodists, one could also assume that the principles and structures of the Oxford Methodists would later be the basis of the principles and and structures of the later Methodist bands.⁷³ Hence, we find in this the connection between the Religious Societies and the Methodist bands.

The developments in John Wesley’s small group at Oxford paralleled the developments of the Moravian communal practice at Herrnhut. Both gathered in small groups to engage in increasingly intense holy conversations on the state of their

⁶⁷ Kevin M. Watson, 28.

⁶⁸ KevinM. Watson, 29.

⁶⁹ Kevin M. Watson, 29.

⁷⁰ Heitzenrater, “The Meditative Piety of the Oxford Methodists,” in *Mirror and Memory*, 85, cited by Kevin M. Watson, 30.

⁷¹ Kevin M. Watson, 30.

⁷² Samuel Wesley, “An Account of the Religious Society begun in Epworth in the Isle of Axholm Lincolnshire, Feb:1, An: Dom: 1701-2,” in W. O. B. Allen and Edmund MacLure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of The Society for Promoting Knowledge, 1698-1898* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1898), 91, cited in Kevin M. Watson, 30.

⁷³ Kevin M. Watson, 31.

member's souls and the sins each has committed. There was also flexibility and change inspired by the effort to pursue a holy life. The difference between the two movements is that the the Moravians gathered in small groups because of their experience of salvation whereas the Methodists at Oxford gathered to find salvation.⁷⁴

John Wesley would later bring together the idea of communal accountability in the pursuit of holiness expressed in both the Anglican and the Moravian traditions into a new synthesis. This synthesis, which began in John Wesley's first contact with the Moravians during his missionary trip to Georgia and further developed in his later relationship with Peter Böhler in London would find its fuller expression in the Fetter Lane Society.⁷⁵ Martin Schmidt suggests that the Fetter Lane Society was not a Moravian band nor was it an Anglican Religious Society. It was really a combination of elements borrowed from the Moravian *Banden* at Herrnhutt, the Anglican Religious Societies, and the personal ideas of John Wesley derived and implemented during his experiences in Oxford and Georgia.⁷⁶ This unique marrying of two traditions put the Fetter Lane Society in a situation of continuous tension. The tension culminated in the formal separation of Wesley and his followers from Fetter Lane in July 20, 1740 over Wesley's continued insistence that one seeking forgiveness should also practice the means of grace.⁷⁷ Despite the controversy surrounding Fetter Lane, it cannot be doubted that the Fetter Lane bands were the direct predecessors of the Methodist bands. For the structure of both types of bands were too identical. Also, Wesley never stopped stressing the importance of band meetings even after he separated from the Fetter Lane Society.⁷⁸

The Methodist band meeting is "the conjunction of the Moravian emphasis on justification by faith and assurance with the Anglican emphasis on growth in holiness through disciplined spiritual practices."⁷⁹ The "Rules of the Band Societies" clearly show the Anglican emphasis on the disciplined practice of the means of grace in its stipulation for all band members to meet weekly, be punctual in attendance, to

⁷⁴ Kevin M. Watson, 31.

⁷⁵ Kevin M. Watson, 32.

⁷⁶ Kevin M. Watson, 37-38. For the discussion of the theological influences behind creation of the Fetter Lane Society and Schmidt's own suggestion, see pp. 34-38.

⁷⁷ Kevin M. Watson, 38. For Wesley's own theological position, see footnote 100 and 101. See also Wesley's journal entry for July 20, 1740 in *Works* 19:162, 427; 1:381; 10:855-858. All references to the writings of John Wesley cited in scripture format as *Works* are taken from John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, Ed. Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984).

⁷⁸ Kevin M. Watson, 38.

⁷⁹ Kevin M. Watson, 72.

begin meetings with “singing or prayer” and end meetings in prayer.⁸⁰ Methodists affirmed John Wesley’s emphasis on the disciplined practice of the means of grace in their accounts of their band meeting experience. G. C. is one Methodist who found in consistent prayer the strength and endurance to overcome his “evil heart at last.” He acknowledged that his participation in his band and class became the means of grace that enabled him to do this.⁸¹ James Jones’ letter to Charles Wesley underscored the importance of being faithful in attending class and band meetings.⁸² Miss P. T.’s letter to John Wesley, asking for fasting and prayer on her behalf so that God will grant her mercy and deliver her from “the power of the Devil,” seems to imply that Methodists in band meetings consistently practiced the means of grace.⁸³ Samuel Roberts’ account of the conduct of band meetings also highlighted, to his annoyance, the consistent practice of the means of grace in the band meetings which band leaders encouraged in their members.⁸⁴

Both the Moravian emphasis on justification by faith and the witness of the Spirit concerning new birth as prerequisites for holiness, and the Anglican insistence on holiness through the disciplined practice of the means of grace, were given concrete expression in the band meetings. This synthesis created opposition for Wesley from both the Anglican and Moravian camps.⁸⁵

Although the “Rules of the Band Societies” were published first,⁸⁶ these became subject to the “General Rules” once the latter were published.⁸⁷ The “Rules” further subdivided the class into even smaller groups, the bands, which took the mutual accountability already present in the classes to deeper and more intimate level. Rather than just the band leader, each band member was able to question one another. The members experienced mutual learning from each other’s experience, giving each other close support and fellowship as all sought the experience of perfect love or sanctification.⁸⁸ The “Directions to the Band Societies” were further issued

⁸⁰ Wesley, “Rules of the Band Societies,” in *Works* 9:77; also Kevin M. Watson, 75.

⁸¹ G. C., journal entry for November 17, 1757, in *AM* 5 (1782):641; cited in Kevin M. Watson, 137.

⁸² James Jones, letter to Charles Wesley, December 24, 1759, *EMV* 95; cited in Kevin M. Watson, 137.

⁸³ Miss P. T., letter to John Wesley, November 28, 1764, in *AM* 6 (1783):216; cited by Kevin M. Watson, 138.

⁸⁴ Samuel Roberts, 201, cited by Kevin M. Watson, 138.

⁸⁵ See Kevin M. Watson’s discussion of Wesley’s conflicts with both parties, 87-93.

⁸⁶ The “Rules of the Band Societies” were published in December 1738; the “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” in 1743. See *Works* 9:69 and 9:77; also Goodhead, 151.

⁸⁷ Goodhead, 156.

⁸⁸ Goodhead, 156.

in 1744⁸⁹ to prescribe a more “practical, outward piety.”⁹⁰ The “Directions” prescribe a lifestyle that characterise what Wesley considers the three elements of primitive Christianity: “ascetic, devoted, and useful.”⁹¹ Espousing the desire of the mystics for perfection yet denying their insistence on the introverted journey towards it, Wesley “wove together a form of communal and personal life that promoted the need for the means of grace and good works.”⁹² The key to perfection is love, “to love God with one’s whole heart, mind, soul and strength.”⁹³

The band meeting is the ideal communal structure for nurturing growth in holiness because it is the only level of communal engagement in Wesley’s schema for spiritual formation that insists on a prior experience of justifying faith and assurance of salvation as a prerequisite for membership.⁹⁴ Band members are naturally more concerned with growth in holiness because they are not as concerned with “working out their salvation” as class members are.⁹⁵ The band was the Methodism’s primary “engine of holiness.” No other communal structure is as focused on fostering growth in holiness as the band meeting.⁹⁶ No wonder that Wesley continually urged the formation of bands up to the end of his life, even after the formation and continued success of class meetings throughout the Methodist movement.⁹⁷ The “sinews” of early Methodism, sources of its continuing vitality, for Wesley was both the band meeting and the class meetings.⁹⁸ The class meeting tended to be seen as more significant for early Methodism because class membership was required but band membership was not. This was understandable in view of the fact that class meetings were designed for the “working out” of one’s salvation.” Class members were required to give an account of the general state of their souls but not everyone has experienced justification and new birth. Band members, however, were required to have a prior experience of justification and new birth before they can meet regularly

⁸⁹ Wesley, “Directions to the Band Societies,” in *Works* 9:79; also Goodhead, 156.

⁹⁰ Goodhead, 157.

⁹¹ Goodhead, 157.

⁹² Goodhead, 157.

⁹³ Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Hepworth Press, 1989), 397, cited in Goodhead, 158.

⁹⁴ Kevin M. Watson, 94. See also Wesley, “Rules of the Band Societies,” in *Works* 9:77.

⁹⁵ Wesley, “General Rules of the United Societies,” in *Works* 9:69. See also Kevin Watson’s comment, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 93-94.

⁹⁶ Kevin M. Watson, 94.

⁹⁷ Wesley, Letter to Jonathan Coussins, February, 25, 1785, in *Letters* (Telford) 7:259; Letter to Thomas Wride, November 17, 1785 in 7:301; Letter to William Simpson, April 26, 1788, in 8:57; cited in Kevin M. Watson, 94-95.

⁹⁸ Wesley, “Plain Account,” in *Works*, Jackson, 11:433.

to confess their sins to one another. Though all who have had assurance of forgiveness of sin can profit from attending band meetings, the purpose of the band meeting is better met if the membership was voluntary rather than compulsory.⁹⁹

Wesley saw the decline of the bands during his lifetime. It was a development that caused him much concern¹⁰⁰ because it meant the failure of his vision of spreading “scriptural holiness over the land.” Without Christian community to nurture it, holiness cannot grow and Methodism will be a dead religion, even if there will still be Methodists in Europe or America.¹⁰¹ Toward the end of his life, Wesley continued to insist on the importance of band meetings as a means to foster holiness. For him, “salvation by faith” is “preceded by repentance” and “followed by holiness.”¹⁰² “Holiness of heart and life” is the “essence” of Methodism. The “circumstantials” of Methodism—the communal structures consisting of the societies, the classes, the bands, and the rules governing them—all contribute to the nurture of its essentials. Should the “circumstantials” be lost, then the essentials are sure to follow.¹⁰³ Wesley expressed his frustration at the decline of Methodism’s vitality as a consequence of its failure to meet in community in his sermon, “On God’s Vineyard.”¹⁰⁴

Band meetings continued even up to the nineteenth century but the evidence also showed that they were in serious decline.¹⁰⁵ Part of the reason may have been that the band meetings came to resemble prayer meetings until the prayer meetings replaced the band meetings.¹⁰⁶

Even after the advent of class meetings in 1742, band meetings still continued¹⁰⁷ led by lay leaders who nurtured the spiritual growth of future

⁹⁹ Kevin M. Watson, 96.

¹⁰⁰ Wesley, Letters to Edward Jackson, Joseph Taylor, and William Simpson, in *Letters* (Telford) 7:47; 7:139; 8:57. See Kevin Watson’s analysis in *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 96.

¹⁰¹ Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works* 9:528-529; Kevin M. Watson, 96-97.

¹⁰² Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works* 9:528.

¹⁰³ Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works* 9:529, cited commented on by Kevin M. Watson, 97.

¹⁰⁴ *Works* 3:516-517, cited and commented on by Kevin M. Watson, 97-98.

¹⁰⁵ Donald M. Grundy, “A History of the Original Methodists” in *PWHS* 35 (1965-66):192-193, citing “Rules of the Original Methodists,” cited in Kevin M. Watson, 175, and William Dean’s explanation in footnote 156.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin M. Watson, 177. See 177-181, for his full discussion of the transition.

¹⁰⁷ Kevin M. Watson, 116.

preachers.¹⁰⁸ The bands helped future leaders discern their calling.¹⁰⁹ This method of discernment follows the same procedure as that followed in band conversations wherein the band members searched one another's hearts for the presence of sin.¹¹⁰ This type of conversation is necessary because the uncovering of "hidden sins and secrets of the heart" leads to holiness of life.¹¹¹ It also leads to deeper love for one another in the band and mutual encouragement to persevere in the path of social holiness.¹¹²

It is a great loss to Methodism that Wesley's original plan to use the Methodist bands for the formation of social holiness among his followers eventually failed in his lifetime. Even the Methodist classes which later replaced the Methodist bands also died out. But just as the Methodist class meeting is being revived today through the Covenant Discipleship Group strategy, perhaps it is time for the Methodist Church to revive the strategy of using Methodist bands to form Scriptural holiness among its members. It is the hope of this author that these bands of holiness will preserve the spiritual vitality of the United Methodist Church in the coming generations

¹⁰⁸ Kevin M. Watson, 117. Wesley himself mentions about the existence of these band leaders in his letter to Dorothy Furly, May 18, 1757, *Letters* (Telford), 3:214.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Olivers, "An Account of the Life of Mr. Thomas Olivers, written by Himself," in *The Arminian Magazine* (Wesley and WMC [GBr], 118-97) 2:129; Alexander Mather, "An Account of Mr. Alexander Mather: in a Letter to Rev. John Wesley," in *The Arminian Magazine* 3:146-147, cited in Kevin M. Watson, 122-123. Later references to *The Arminian Magazine* will use the abbreviation AM followed by the volume and page number in scripture format.

¹¹⁰ John Oliver, letter to John Wesley, June 1, 1779, in AM, "An Account of Mr. John Oliver, Written by himself," 2:(1779), 419-420; John Bennet, diary for December 21, 1747; published in Simon Ross Valentine, "Significant inroads into Satan's Seat: Methodism in Bradford: 1740-1760," PWHS 51 (1997-98), 147, cited in Kevin M. Watson, 24.

¹¹¹ John Bennet, diary for December 21, 1747; also Kevin M. Watson, 124.

¹¹² John Bennet, letter to John Wesley, April 25, 1749, MAM, Ref: FL BNNJ(25/04/1749) Clm. box.; cited by Kevin M. Watson, 124-125

DOING A POSTCOLONIAL FILIPINO THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE/S

By Berne Umali Mabalay, Ph.D.

Introduction

One seminary student wrote a poem entitled “Exposed” and stated this observation,

We’ve all been exposed.
Not necessarily to the virus
(though maybe . . . who knows)
We’ve all been exposed BY the virus.¹

The poem claims that COVID-19 has exposed our true colors, the gods we worship, our hypocrisies, and our obsessions of control. I also posit that this pandemic has exposed residues of colonization. Renzo Guinto, a Filipino physician, and public health expert, points out that COVID-19 is both a “mirror and magnifying glass” that is “reminding us and it’s just magnifying to us what is already defective in the system.”² In other words, the pandemic magnifies colonial attitudes in global health. This article is about postcolonial engagement of the driving force of oppression, which is argued here as globalization, the dominant context of the Philippines. Filipino Theology of Struggle appears to be the first contextual theology constructed in the 1980s to fight authoritarianism and repression. However, it has lost its relevance and influence in contemporary theological discourse. Hence, this study attempts to provoke Filipino ecumenical theologians to reconsider its validity in engaging the present postcolonial context of the Philippines by rethinking Filipino Theology of Struggle in postcolonial terms.

¹ Sarah Bournes, “Exposed,” *I AM NYACK*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.nyack.edu/news/a-response-to-covid-19-exposed-by-sarah-bournes-20-ats/>.

² Amruta Byatnal, “Is COVID-19 magnifying colonial attitudes in global health?,” *Devex*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.devex.com/news/is-covid-19-magnifying-colonial-attitudes-in-global-health-97499>.

Postcolonial Lens

In this article, the term postcolonialism follows this definition: “Postcolonialism has come to mean not only a simple periodization after Western countries dominated militarily but also a methodological revisionism that enables a wholesale critique of Western structures of knowledge and power since the Enlightenment.”³ Applied to the Philippine context, postcolonial criticism focuses on interrogating Western construction of Christianity and its imposition on Filipinos during the Spanish and American colonial eras and their hegemony in the present time.

In surveying postcolonialism, R. S. Sugirtharajah analyzed three streams of postcoloniality, which he stated as follows: 1) “Textual practices and resistance to colonial supremacy,” 2) “Recovering the ‘cultural soul’ from the intellectual and cultural grip of the master,” and 3) “Mutual interdependence and transformation.”⁴ The first stream is about resistance during the colonial period. In the Philippines, revolutionaries exemplified this stream during the colonial period, such as Jose Rizal, who later became a national hero. Nicolas Zamora, one of the first Filipino Protestant pastors who seceded from American missionary rule, also advocates this stream of postcoloniality. The second stream of postcolonialism consists of deconstructing identity or culture shaped by the colonizers and recovering the pre-colonized status of indigeneity. For example, Renato Constantino is described as the one who exposed “miseducation of Filipinos” by discoursing a revisionist approach to history.⁵ Another example is Ed Lapiz, a Filipino exponent on cultural redemption, who advocates for reshaping Christianity by incorporating indigenous practices into it. He argues that the dominant Christianity is “wearing a colonial face,” which must be stripped off and clothed with indigenous ones.⁶ In the third stream of postcolonialism, the theory of hybridity, in-betweenness, and liminality is explored. The first and second streams are based on the binary relationship of colonizer and the colonized, but the third stream focuses on going beyond this binary interpretation, such as hybridity.

³ Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (New York: Orbis, 2000), 109.

⁴ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 248-250.

⁵ Renato Constantino, “The Miseducation of the Filipino,” August 15, 2019, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7735/865e2ea8fd8d9662f3916ffe41cc14376706.pdf>.

⁶ Ed Lapiz, “The Redemption of Dance for Christian Worship,” Kaloob, accessed April 6, 2021, http://www.redemptionofdance.org/Dance_and_the_Christian6.html.

In postcolonial circle, the triad of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak has paved the way for different methods of interpreting the nature and impact of colonization on formerly colonized nations. While there are many other postcolonial scholars that fomented discursive critique on colonialism and imperialism, the three theorists are appropriated in this study. In every formerly colonized nation, there were precursors of colonial discourse. In the Philippines, for instance, there were anti-colonial and postcolonial personalities who successfully conscientized colonized Filipinos to break away from colonial control. The Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal, produced two influential books that portrayed how Spanish colonizers oppressed Filipinos.⁷ One of the first indigenous Protestant churches in the Philippines (1909) also seceded from American control of Philippine churches through Nicolas Zamora, the first Filipino ordained pastor.⁸ This phenomenon is also true in most formerly colonized nations that were soon liberated and became independent. At any rate, it is only when postcolonialism was established as a theory or criticism that formerly colonized nations better understand how colonialism was deeply embedded in the people and how it manifests continuing neo-colonialism. Being liberated from colonization does not solely mean political independence or democracy, but it also denotes decolonization or undoing the continuing excesses of colonization.

The main tasks of postcolonial hermeneutics, as explained by Sugirtharajah, are: 1) "Scrutiny of biblical documents for their colonial entanglements," 2) "To engage in reconstructive reading of biblical texts," and 3) "To interrogate both colonial and metropolitan interpretations."⁹ The first task is deconstruction, which critiques how the "colonialist views and interests of dominant groups have shaped the Bible, theologies, and doctrines."¹⁰ Behind this domination, postcolonial criticism attempts to recover the muted or silenced texts. One example is when Spain colonized pre-Hispanic natives; the Filipinos' native script was muted or eradicated and replaced by colonizers' script. However, there are still extant documents, such as *Doctrina Cristiana* printed in indigenous script, that can recover the linguistic identity of colonized Filipinos. In reconstruction, the task is to "reread texts in the light of struggles of liberation in the past and the present, hybrid and fragmented identities,

⁷Jose Rizal's works, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, were written as anti-colonial nationalist historical fiction which exposed corruption and domination of Spaniards in the Philippines. These books are part of Philippine education curriculum.

⁸Ruben F. Trinidad, *A Monument to Religious Nationalism: History and Polity of the IEMELIF Church* (Quezon City, Metro Manila: IEMELIF, 1999).

⁹ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 251-255.

¹⁰ Agnes M. Brazal, *A Theology of Southeast Asia: Liberation-Postcolonial Ethics in the Philippines* (New York: Orbis, 2019), 335, Kindle.

and subaltern perspectives.”¹¹ In interrogating metropolitan or dominant reading, the task is to “lift up resistance on the part of the dominated and to critique simplistic binary representations.”¹² These three tasks constitute postcolonial interpretation.

Why Postcolonial Approach?

Globalization of the Philippine economy serves as the dominant context in reconstructing historical projects towards a liberating postcolonial Filipino theology. This context is entirely different from the dictatorial context in the 1980s when Filipino Theology of Struggle was formed. Filipino Theology of Struggle has focused so much on political context while neglecting other aspects of oppression, such as gender, the plight of indigenous peoples, patriarchy, ecology, and migration, among others. This research attempts to move beyond liberation hermeneutics by incorporating postcolonial hermeneutics. I concur that the historical projects that shaped Theology of Struggle have served their purpose; hence it needs reconstruction. The construct “Struggle” is as homogeneous as the term “Liberation” in the epistemological construction of Filipino Theology of Struggle. It needs to be more specific and relevant to diverse realities of struggles of different groups. This study proposes a postcolonial approach in rethinking Filipino Theology of Struggle.

One of the foremost exponents of Theology of Struggle, Eleazar Fernandez, also realized the need to utilize postcolonial scholarship in redefining liberation and the poor.¹³ The dominance of globalization also necessitates a postcolonial approach as a more tenable strategy in critiquing and resisting its oppressive impact on all aspects of life of Filipinos. Postcolonialism is argued as one of the major critiques or adversaries of globalization. As one Indian political scientist, Sankaran Krishna, pointed out, “if neoliberal globalization is the attempt at naturalizing and depoliticizing the logic of the market, or the logic of the economy, postcolonialism is the effort to politicize and denaturalize that logic.”¹⁴ In her *Politics of Postcolonialism*, Rumina Sethi shares the same sentiment and challenges postcolonial studies to

¹¹ Brazal, *A Theology of Southeast Asia*, 342.

¹² Brazal, *A Theology of Southeast Asia*, 351.

¹³ Eleazar Fernandez, “Multiple Locations–Belongings and Power Differentials: Lenses for a Liberating Biblical Hermeneutic,” in *Soundings in Cultural Criticism: Perspectives and Methods in Culture, Power and Identity in the New Testament*, eds. Francisco Lozada and Greg Carey (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2013). I acknowledge Dr. Eleazar Fernandez for personally sending me via Facebook Messenger this article.

¹⁴ Sankaran Krishna, *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the 21st Century* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2009), 2.

incorporate liberation discourses, such as neo-Marxist analysis, to unmask neoliberal globalization.¹⁵

Liberation hermeneutics and postcolonialism should work together in engaging against globalization. However, there are interpretive categories that need to be sustained and weaned off, such as the homogeneous approach of Latin American Liberation Theology of the poor. In the Philippines, theologians of struggle focused too much on national liberation and neglected marginalized minorities, especially the most marginalized and oppressed. Hence, liberation hermeneutics and postcolonialism must not be in opposition to each other but be in partnership. As pointed out by Gerald West, Musa Dube is “an excellent example of a form of postcolonialism which remains rooted in a liberation framework.”¹⁶ Musa Dube even considers postcolonialism as a “servant of liberation.”¹⁷

Gerald West also argues that “liberation theology provides what postcolonialism lacks,” that is, a hermeneutic in which Marxism and poststructuralism have a place.¹⁸ Here, West recommends Cornel West’s “hermeneutic which combines three strands of poststructuralism, progressive Marxism and prophetic Christianity.”¹⁹ Agnes Brazal explains how liberation-postcolonial theology can be done: 1) making use of discourse analysis appropriated from postcolonial theories, and 2) fostering vernacular cosmopolitanism that reappreciates the wisdom of the local culture but is also open to insights and intercultural exchange from other cultures.²⁰ In Brazal’s liberation-postcolonial construction, she depends on postcolonial neo-Marxist Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha’s vernacular cosmopolitanism.

Framework of “A Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggles”

Naming is important. Unfortunately, when Louie Hechanova suggested the name “Theology of Struggle,” it also opened up the possibility of theologians

¹⁵Rumina Sethi, *The Politics of Postcolonialism: Empire, Nation and Resistance* (London: PlutoPress, 2011).

¹⁶ Gerald West, “Doing Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation@Home: Ten Years of (South) African Ambivalence,” *Neotestamentica* 1 (2008): 155.

¹⁷ Musa Dube, “Postcolonialism and Liberation,” in *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation*, ed. Miguel de la Torre (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 293.

¹⁸ West, “Doing Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 161.

¹⁹ West, “Doing Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 161.

²⁰ Brazal, *A Theology of Southeast Asia*, 390.

engaging in armed struggle. Protestant theologians of struggle in the 1980s did not resort to armed struggle, but they considered armed struggle as a last resort in defending one's life from repressive military rule. Among conservative evangelical communities, Theology of Struggle was demonized and misrepresented as a mere Marxist social movement. The battle cry "Makibaka, huwag matakot!" (Struggle, do not be afraid!) has been associated by Filipinos with leftist rhetoric and activism. Hence, it needs to be reconstructed, including its hermeneutical framework, to encourage churches to resist neocolonization or globalization.

"A Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggles" is Contextual Reading

Postcolonial theology critiques the oppressive contexts and their continuing influence, which perpetuates colonial legacies, to effect liberation. David Bradnick defines postcolonial theology as "academic discipline within religious thought whereby structures of power, dominant systems, and embedded ideologies are examined, critiqued, and negotiated to make social transformations that recognize and validate the perspectives of marginalized peoples, cultures, and identities."²¹

Since the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) provided guidelines for doing theology from Asian resources, Filipino theologians have accepted the challenge and begun doing liberating contextual theologies.²² Filipino Theology of Struggle is acknowledged as contextual theology. However, since its basic construction in the 1980s, it can be argued that there are limited writings that were written by contemporary Filipino theologians. The works of Eleazar Fernandez and Levi Oracion remain the primary references.²³ However, studying contextual theologies from other Asian countries has reached most seminaries in Metro Manila. The current contextual theologizing among Filipino theologians has resourced contextual reading of the Bible, Filipino experiences of struggles as social biography, and ecumenical engagement as partners in doing theology.

²¹ Joshua D. Reichard, "Mutually Transformative Missions: A Postcolonial, Process-Relational Pentecostal Missiology," *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 3 (2015): 245.

²² The Critical Asian Principle (CAP) was developed by ATESEA to serve as a framework in doing theology for Asian theologians. This document was improved and later became known as "Guidelines for Doing Theologies in Asia." See, "Guidelines for Doing Theologies in Asia." Association for Theological Education in South East Asia, accessed May 9, 2021, <https://atesea.net/accreditation/doing-theologies-in-asia/>.

²³ Their representative works include Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994); Levi Oracion, *God with Us: Reflections on the Theology of Struggle* (Dumaguete: Silliman University, 2001).

Contextual Reading

To be spiritual is to be apolitical. Such was the general mindset of spirituality in the Philippines for the whole duration of foreign occupation. The Bible served as a weapon that tamed superstitious Filipinos from questioning colonial powers. In fact, possession of the Bible by Filipinos was considered a crime during Spanish colonial times.

In Sugirtharajah's *The Bible and the Third World* (2001), he maps out "marks of colonial hermeneutics," namely: 1) Inculcation, 2) Encroachment, 3) Displacement, 4) "Analogies and implication or the juxtaposition," 5) "Textualization or privileging the written Word of God over the oral," and 6) Historicization of faith.²⁴ These concepts describe a modernistic approach to the Scripture. Such fundamentalist approach to the Bible is described as "troublesome texts" by Sugirtharajah.²⁵ This reading still dominates most seminaries in the Philippines. However, there are few Filipino theologians and seminaries that move away from colonial reading to contextual reading.

The aim of reading the Bible is not to experience personal self-gratification but to find similarities and particularities of struggles between the text and the present context in pursuing liberation and justice. In contextual reading, the Bible is not to be read in a vacuum, but as Karl Barth said, "We must hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other." God did not stop revealing to people when the books of the Bible were canonized. A critical reflection on historical praxis, as Gutierrez argued, is the first step of theologizing.

Contextual reading recognizes that no culture is without the gospel, and no gospel is without culture. The missionary mindset that she or he brings the gospel to unreached people groups should be abandoned to build a harmonious community. It is time to acknowledge that each people group or nation inherently possesses the Christic principle of liberation from oppression. As Edicio dela Torred asserts, "Christ must be a Filipino if Filipinos are to be Christians."²⁶ As such, Bible reading employs liberative exegesis. Contextual reading liberates Asian readers from colonial eyes. In C. S. Song's *Third Eye Theology* (2002), he proposes

²⁴ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 63-73.

²⁵ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008).

²⁶ Quoted in Fernandez, *Towards a Theology of Struggle* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 2.

that Asian readers should not read the Bible with German eyes, but the “third eye,” which is the Asian eye, rich in imagination rather than philosophical speculation.²⁷

Experiences of Struggles

History and hermeneutics are essential in doing theology. By history, it means not only the history of God’s people as recorded in sacred scriptures but also stories of oppression throughout the ages. These narratives of experiences of oppression are what construct theology. The Filipino Theology of Struggle was shaped by these narratives of struggles. It affirms that the Bible is a product of experiences of oppression and liberation of God’s people; hence, Filipino struggles also formed Theology of Struggle.

The Philippines was colonized for four centuries—by Spain, America, and Japan. These phases of colonization were also eras of missionization, particularly in Spain and America. Indeed, to colonize was to missionize. Spanish and American occupations made the Philippines the only Christian nation in Asia. However, Christianity was used and abused by these colonizers to deodorize their political occupation of the land. Renato Constantino, a nationalist historian, puts it:

The Filipino people have had the misfortune of being ‘liberated.’ First came the Spaniards who liberated them from the ‘enslavement of the devil.’ Next came the Americans who ‘liberated’ them from Spanish oppression; then the Japanese who ‘liberated’ them from American imperialism. The Americans again who ‘liberated’ them from Japanese fascists. After every liberation, they found their country occupied by their foreign benefactors.²⁸

These politics of substitution did not liberate the Philippines; instead, they only served the geopolitical interests of colonizers and put the Philippines in a state of permanent crisis—both economic and identity crises. Take American colonization as a primary example: their so-called benevolence in buying off Philippine independence from Spain only put the country as a neo-colony perpetually indebted to America. After 9/11, University of the Philippines professor Bobby Tuazon contends that “a new global security framework gives the U. S. guarantees not only for the entrenchment and expansion of its various military installations but also for armed intervention whenever and wherever threats to U. S. vital interests occur,” while also providing “security guarantees vital for the global free trade and U. S.

²⁷ C. S. Song, *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

²⁸ Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, vol. 1 (Quezon City, Philippines: Renato Constantino, 1975), 12.

economic hegemony under the guise of globalization and economic restructuring.”²⁹ The Philippines is the most strategic country which can ensure control in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea. It is the “gateway to Southeast Asia at the heart of the South China Sea, and the fulcrum from which the U. S. can project its military, intelligence, and economic power throughout the Far East region.”³⁰

The nature of religion that Spain brought to indigenous Filipinos was a fear-based religion. Such an approach was particularly evident when Spanish Inquisition commenced in the country in the 15th century, where indigenous Filipinos were forced to be converted and cooperate with Catholicism. How Spanish Catholicism repressed the religious consciousness of Filipinos was fully described by Jose Rizal, the country’s turned national hero, in his works of historical fiction, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. For three centuries of Spanish domination, religion and politics were married like two strange bed-fellows. There was no separation of church and state. The liberating nature of the church was thrown into a pit of passivity.

When America occupied the country via the Spanish-American War, “one-tenth of Filipino population was wiped out.”³¹ Soon after, efforts at converting Filipinos to their brand of Christianity were also carefully planned and implemented. Before their missionaries came, the 1902 comity agreement in New York already divided the country into evangelical jurisdictions to avoid the ire of their missionaries. The nature of Christian spirituality which they successfully established among converts, was also indifferent to the political realm. They introduced the separation of church and state in Philippine laws, so much so that the church was successfully confined to its four walls or its four corners. Also, U. S. Manifest Doctrine was perceived by Filipinos that they were considered as incapable of governing their churches; therefore, the Philippines was to remain as a foreign mission field.³² The first Filipino ordained pastor, Nicolas Zamora, led a major schism from the Methodist Episcopal Church and established the first surviving indigenous evangelical church in the Philippines, the *Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas* (IEMELIF). IEMELIF historian Ruben Trinidad acknowledges Zamora as “the foremost leader of religious liberation in the Philippines.” His challenging statements to Filipinos were: “Kung ang mga banyaga ay biniyayaan ng Diyos ng kakayahang mamahala ng iglesia, ang mga Filipino ay gayun din.” (If God

²⁹ Quoted in Larry Chin, “The United States in the Philippines: Post 9/11 Imperatives,” Centre for Research on Globalisation, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://archives.globalresearch.ca/articles/CHI207A.html>.

³⁰ Chin, “The United States in the Philippines.”

³¹ Chin, “The United States in the Philippines.”

³² Trinidad, *Monument to Religious Nationalism*, 100.

blessed foreigners with the ability to govern a church, so are the Filipinos).³³ Zamora believed that God has ordained that the Gospel should be preached and propagated by the Filipinos, for the Filipinos, using their native tongues. This first Filipino pastor who established the first surviving evangelical indigenous church was forgotten in the history of Philippine Christianity; but, to this day, the IEMELIF Church witnesses to the ability of Filipinos to self-theologize, self-govern, self-propagate, and self-sustain a church.

During the American occupation, socio-economic, political, and religious life was marked by systemic oppression of people and exploitation of their land. The number of deaths alone was unimaginable. Such suffering did not end after occupation but persists to the present. Indeed, colonial rule had already passed when the Philippines gained its independence. However, wars, exploitation, and oppression within the country are still besetting the victims, especially the poor. The center of Philippine economy, Metro Manila, is perceived by the marginalized people in Muslim Mindanao as imperial and oppressive. Indeed, it is. The Muslim struggle in Mindanao serves as a major context in reshaping the theology of struggle. This reality demands that theologians of struggle empathize with those in the margins. There is a growing trend where theologians from the margins who get their training in Manila or overseas no longer go back and prefer greener pastures in the center due to the marketization of seminary education.

Globalization and free trade are now the major causes of Filipino struggle. Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South Director, details how “the World Bank, the CIA, and other U. S. agencies have systematically plundered the domestic economy of the Philippines for transnational corporate interests, privatization, and deregulation.”³⁴ Struggles never end. Thus, theological options for those who struggle always exist. Struggles may have caused festering wounds in the lives of Filipinos, but as one Mexican proverb says, “They tried to bury us, they didn’t know we were seeds.”

Ecumenical Movement

The ecumenical alliance of Christians and people of other faiths or ideologies significantly shaped theology of struggle. This development was made real through a unifying factor, which is love for the country and the poor. Such effort is an ecumenism of love. Love, indeed, ought to be the spirit of theologizing because God, the essence of theology, is love. Interfaith and intrafaith ecumenism are essential in doing contextual theology.

One of the challenges in ecumenism today is the issue of participation. The former chairperson of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Bishop

³³ Trinidad, *A Monument to Religious Nationalism*, 119-120.

³⁴ Chin, “The United States in the Philippines.”

Nathanael Lazaro, stated: “Even conciliar fellowship at the grassroots level faces resistance among member churches.”³⁵ When ecumenism becomes an affair of the hegemonic or elites and excludes the poor in its negotiating tables, it becomes ecumenism of minorities, the dominating minorities.

In doing contextual theology, ecumenical comrades, especially those who suffer/ed and struggle/d, are the ones who credibly articulate its prophetic nature. Doing theology in the age of globalization and exclusion demands that the victims of domination and those most affected by it be the central element of the theological framework. There is a need to recognize that poverty scholars are also Bible scholars. The ecumenical council’s theological reflection based on critical analysis of social and economic, and political situation remains very useful in construing a contextual theology.

“A Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggles” is Contrapuntal

Like the liberationist Theology of Struggle, Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggles is a liberative theology, but it attempts to revise its hermeneutical method by adopting postcolonial theories. Although Filipino Theology of Struggle is not an exact version of Latin American liberation theology, it takes the theological themes or methodologies of the latter, such as social analysis, the preferential option for the poor, liberation from oppression, reign of God, conscientization, and others. Fernandez provides the methodology in doing Theology of Struggle, with the following framework: 1) “Identifying one’s location or insertion,” 2) “Engaging in hermeneutics of suspicion,” 3) “Engaging in social analysis of the context and exegetical explication of texts,” 4) “Engaging in hermeneutics of retrieval,” and 4) “Theological discernment, fusion of horizons, and imaginative projection”³⁶

Fernandez contextualized the framework of liberation theology to make sure that it is faithful to the Filipino context of struggles. He utilized Paul Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval,” Gadamer’s notion of “fusion of horizons,” and Latin American liberation theologians’ method of “social analysis.” However, this method’s theological sources are primarily the Filipino people’s experiences, context or situation, sociopolitical-cultural analysis and expressions, traditions and dogmas, and the Bible.³⁷ Fernandez further notes that the norm that informs

³⁵ Nathanael P. Lazaro, “One in Fellowship in Christ,” in *CTC Bulletin* 27, no. 1 (June 2011): 16.

³⁶ Fernandez, *Towards a Filipino Theology of Struggle*, 182-185.

³⁷ Fernandez, *Towards a Filipino Theology of Struggle*, 169.

hermeneutics and method of Theology of Struggle is “liberation of the Filipino people.”³⁸

The earlier Fernandez utilized vernacular/liberation hermeneutics from the lens of Latin American liberation theology, with some distinct Filipino categories. However, the later Fernandez has also revised his liberation theology from postcolonial critique. He explains,

I must say that the main insights of liberation hermeneutics continue to have a central place in my reading approach, but my approach has also undergone transformation, particularly with insights from poststructuralism and postcolonial discourse. While I criticize some of the expressions of liberation hermeneutics from a postcolonial lens, I affirm Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s point that liberation hermeneutics and postcolonial discourse are not ‘exclusive oppositions.’³⁹

In Fernandez’s earlier version of liberation hermeneutics, the poor or the people who struggle are analyzed from a homogenous perspective, which he later revised. He further explains that:

While I continue to affirm some of the main tenets of liberation hermeneutics, particularly God’s identification with the poor or the weak in any society as well as its rigorous socio-economic criticism, I must say that unlike the early versions of liberation hermeneutics, I no longer see the poor as “a unified and homogenous revolutionary subject,” a homogenous special class that will drive history forward, but instead is composed of individuals from various walks of life who are struggling for a more dignified life.⁴⁰

It can be deduced that the hermeneutics of Theology of Struggle has depended on vernacular/liberation hermeneutics. Sugirtharajah classifies vernacular and liberation hermeneutics within postcolonial hermeneutics. However, this is critiqued as anachronistic since the term postcolonialism dates from the mid-1980s.⁴¹ Although both liberation and postcolonial approaches have their particularities, it is significant to focus on their similarities, such as the quest for liberation and ending

³⁸ Fernandez, *Towards a Filipino Theology of Struggle*, 175.

³⁹ Fernandez, “Multiple Locations,” 140.

⁴⁰ Fernandez, “Multiple Locations,” 142.

⁴¹ Brazal, *A Theology of Southeast Asia*, 360.

colonial domination. These two approaches can be “partners in praxis,”⁴² and neither should be subordinated to the other. In reading the Bible, liberation hermeneutics focuses more on narratives or texts such as Exodus and the Lukan liberation passage; however, postcolonial hermeneutics rereads the whole Bible, critiques its colonial tendencies, and resists colonial reading. The task of Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggles is to liberate Christianity from a colonial reading of the Bible, and consequently, to create discursive and non-discursive praxis towards the liberation of the Filipino people from neocolonization, such as the oppressive nature of globalization.

In reconstructing Theology of Struggle from postcolonial lens, the contrapuntal reading of Edward Said can recreate its liberative force. On Said’s contrapuntal method, Sugirtharajah pointed out that “articulating together the works of the margins with those of the mainstream, the marginal texts are treated no longer as interesting and informative ethnographic samples valuable only to a few experts but as a challenging and resisting alternative.”⁴³ Further, “What the contrapuntal method does is to bring various textual worlds together and enable us to picture and, perhaps better yet, envisage an alternative world which may not be accessible if one is confined to one text.”⁴⁴ Contrapuntal reading can re-interpret incompatible experiences of Filipino struggles, like thinking through the connection between the surge of COVID-19 infections and opening the economy; the relationship between patronizing the Chinese Sinovac vaccine and the struggles of Filipino fishermen due to Chinese incursion in the West Philippine Sea. This reading considers both metropolitan history and other histories that dominant discourse tries to silence.

In interpreting globalization, contrapuntal reading “dislodges the notion that the world’s history is synonymous with European history,”⁴⁵ or the U. S. for that matter. It can also expose concealed histories behind the struggles of Filipinos under globalization. Contrapuntal reading encourages theologians to ask: What can be the discrepant relationship between President Rodrigo Duterte’s recent “War on Drug

⁴² David Moe, “Postcolonial and Liberation Theologies as Partners in Praxis Against Sin and Suffering: A Hermeneutical Approach in Asian Perspective,” *Exchange* 45, no. 4 (November 2016): 321.

⁴³ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 22.

⁴⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 152.

⁴⁵ William Coleman and Alina Sajed, *Fifty Key Thinkers on Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 196.

Trade” and his alliance with “Free Trade”? What are “concealed histories” behind People Powers in the Philippines?

In resisting neocolonization, postcolonial Theology of Struggles exposes concealed histories of globalization. In Revelation Velunta’s *Reading the Parables of Jesus Inside a Jeepney* (2017), he interprets parables in a subversive way. Parables are not stories with heavenly meanings but ones with heavy meanings.⁴⁶ Globalization has portrayed a grand parable that the West is world history. The task of postcolonial Theology of Struggle is to dislodge this notion, which would “bring into productive tension hegemonic and subaltern/subjugated histories,” as Edward Said argued.⁴⁷

Similarly, the Bible, which is a source of postcolonial Theology of Struggle, can be interpreted contrapuntally. This reading is similar to Archie Lee’s “cross-textual hermeneutics,”⁴⁸ where Asian text (like Filipino text) and biblical text are read contrapuntally. This reading can provide a lens to those who interpret from the standpoint of Filipinos who struggle. Postcolonial Theology of Struggle is not a mere academic exercise, but one that penetrates the grassroots or the masses struggling every day. Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggle appropriates Filipino Theology of Struggle’s liberative praxis, but it also incorporates a postcolonial lens. Sugirtharajah outlines what postcolonial reading of the Bible can do to interpretation, namely: 1) “placing the texts and their subsequent interpretations in ancient and modern colonial contexts,” 2) “contravenes the neatly defined religious and textual exclusivity of traditional exegesis which confines itself to Hebraic and Hellenistic texts,” and 3) treats “the historical and the hermeneutical are one interrelated and continuous activity.”⁴⁹

Unlike vernacular hermeneutics, postcolonial interpretation does not attempt to produce neat interpretations but engages the Bible as “contested and ambiguous.”⁵⁰ Postcolonial Theology of Struggle interprets the Bible as liberative and emancipatory; however, it also acknowledges that the same Bible legitimizes dominant norms in some parts of Scripture, such as colonization stories. Hence,

⁴⁶ Revelation Velunta, *Reading the Parables of Jesus Inside a Jeepney* (Dasmariñas, Cavite: Revelation E. Velunta, 2017).

⁴⁷ William Coleman and Alina Sajed, *Five Key Thinkers on Globalization*, 196.

⁴⁸ Archie Lee, “Cross-Textual Interpretation as Postcolonial Strategy in Bible Translation in Asia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190888459.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190888459-e-16>.

⁴⁹ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 171.

⁵⁰ Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 171.

postcolonial Theology of Struggle reads contrapuntally. As a postcolonial reading, it does not cleanse the Bible from its oppressive and colonial tendencies but resists them.

“A Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggles” is Resistant

Although postcolonial Theology of Struggle utilizes the theory of hybridity, its nature is emancipatory hybridity, contrary to hegemonic hybridity of globalization. There are two opposing views on the role of postcolonial theories, particularly hybridity, in the power and domination of globalization. One opinion argues that Bhabha’s hybridity and postcolonial binarism have fueled the neoliberal economic system. Amar Acheraiou, a scholar in literary studies, postcolonialism, and globalization, argued in his book that,

As in postcolonial hybridity discourse, so, too, within neoliberal doxa is cultural and racial difference valorized and promoted. Difference is incorporated into mainstream liberal parlance and harnessed to the interests of rapacious transnational firms and comprador groups.⁵¹

Acheraiou contends that Bhabha’s hybridity, which was constructed as a third space of enunciation, has become a locus of neoliberalism and “global hybridities of power and domination.” Hybridity “contrary to the assumptions of the postcolonial promoters of hybridity discourse, not contested or subverted, but asserted with force and brutality.”⁵² Acheraiou further argues that both hybridity and postcolonial binarism have promoted neoliberal doxa, such as the neoliberal ideals of “good governance” and “democracy.” The author attempts to break a new path by disentangling hybridity from postcolonialism and arguing that hybridity is not an aberration but a globalizing norm.

Contrary to Acheraiou’s analysis, the other scholarship argues that postcolonial hybridity and binarism are counter-hegemonic, and they are emancipatory from neocolonial power and domination of globalization. While Bhabha acknowledges the hybridity that characterizes globalization, this hybridity has fueled both oppression and prosperity; but his construct of hybridity is emancipatory. Bhabha explains, “What we have seen is that globalization produces its own kind of

⁵¹ Amar Acheraiou, *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 181.

⁵² Acheraiou, *Questioning Hybridity*, 181.

poverty and its own inequality, just as it produces oases of privilege and success.”⁵³ Marwan Kraidy elaborates the counter-hegemonic nature of Bhabha’s theory of hybridity:

Bhabha (1994) explores hybridity in the context of the postcolonial novel and celebrates it as a symptom of resistance by the colonized, as the contamination of imperial ideology, aesthetics, and identity by natives striking back at colonial domination. He emphasizes hybridity’s ability to subvert dominant discourses and reappropriate them to create what he calls “cultures of postcolonial contra-modernity.”⁵⁴

Mimicry undermines colonial representation because it reveals the ambivalence of colonial discourse, thereby opening up for the creation of alternative space. Kraidy further explains, “The cultural hybridity enacted in mimicry, best captured by Bhabha’s notion of “third space,” is thus understood as a subversive practice of resistance.”⁵⁵

Hybridity is not complicit with the globalization project. Instead, it can be argued that modern hybridization is a consequence of globalization; in the same way, colonization produced hybridity. Hence, hybridity can function as a counter-hegemonic discourse. Postcolonial Theology of Struggle is a subversive theology that resists neocolonization, which is in the form of globalization. The “in-betweenness” that exists in Filipino postcolonial reality is a third space resistance that can expose the ambivalence that globalization has produced—both in the Filipino way of being human and way of doing spirituality.

Postcolonial Theology of Struggle considers the oppressive hybridization that globalization has created. One of the major struggles of Filipinos is the impact of migration, such as exposure of women to foreign cultures and its resulting hybridity. The liberalization of immigration laws has resulted in a massive migration of labor. The latest data reports that more than 10% of the population of the Philippines have migrated to more than 200 countries worldwide. This exposure to foreign culture and way of life has immersed Filipinos in a neocolonial relationship. One prominent case is the migration of domestic workers in many parts of the world. They are pejoratively described as “items auctioned in the internet in Canada,” “products that

⁵³ Quoted in Brett Milano, “Detours, Some Fraught, on Path to Global Citizenship,” *The Harvard Gazette*, October 25, 2017, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/10/harvard-scholars-tackle-complex-realities-of-globalization/>.

⁵⁴ Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 58. In this book, the author mainly argues that hybridity is hegemonically constructed.

⁵⁵ Kraidy, *Hybridity*, 58.

come with warranties/replacements put on sale by recruiters in Hong Kong,” “helpers in Malaysia who work day and night following orders and just frown when tired,” “clowns of Los Angeles who have to be adept at following the ‘emotional script,’ that is, to be ‘always happy,’” “marginalized resident aliens of Italy,” “religiously-repressed foreign workers in Saudi Arabia,” and “captive in their workplace (employers’ home).”⁵⁶

In her book, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration* (2010), Gemma Tulud-Cruz constructs a theology of migrant domestic workers using the context of Filipinas in Hong Kong. She called this “feminist theology of struggle.” There are more than 180,000 house workers in Hong Kong, and all of them are women. She explored possibilities of doing theology of migration by analyzing the plight of domestic workers. She explained,

The life of the Filipina domestic workers or DHs (as they are more popularly called) in H.K. is a constant (re)negotiation of the gamut of problematic situations they go through, as Filipino women working as domestic workers in H.K. Religion plays a central and double-edged role in this everyday struggle. Moreover, this struggle not just provides windows into contemporary forms of oppression but also offers paths towards liberation, particularly in the context of the emerging field for theological reflection, that is, migration.⁵⁷

Tulud-Cruz challenged Theology of Struggle to focus on external struggles, such as the struggles that overseas domestic workers bear on a daily basis. Not only migrants Filipina in Hong Kong, but along with more than 10 million overseas Filipinos, this migration significantly hybridizes Filipino culture and identity. Stuart Hall, a postcolonial scholar, states that

Traditions coexist with the emergence of new, hybrid and crossover cultural forms of tremendous vitality and innovation. These communities are in touch with their differences without being saturated by tradition; they are actively involved with every aspect of life around them without the illusion of assimilation and identity.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Gemma Tulud-Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration: Pilgrims in the Wilderness* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 5-6.

⁵⁷ Tulud-Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration*, 7.

⁵⁸ Stuart Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘the Heritage,’ Re-Imagining the Post-Nation,” in *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of ‘Race,’* eds. Jo Littler and Roshi Naidoo (New York: Routledge, 2005), 30.

In the context of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, what Hall argues is that cultural differences have produced hybridity or a space of in-betweenness (like Bhabha). The relationship between domestic workers can be compared to “intimate enemies,” “in but not of Hong Kong,” and “conscripts of modernity” (like James Scott).⁵⁹

**“A Postcolonial Filipino Theology of Struggles”
Translates the Voice of Subaltern**

The dominant Western theologies have played a significant role in shaping Filipino theologians. As argued by Eleazar Fernandez and Feliciano Carino, Filipino theologians have become compradors or agents of marketing Western theologies to Philippine Christianity. With the domination of imported theologies in the Philippines, local theologizing is struggling to make its voice heard. Even Filipino Theology of Struggle is having difficulties making a statement among ecumenical churches. More so, its voice remains unheard in evangelical churches.

When Gayatri Spivak wrote her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?, several responses on the mute subaltern have been proposed, such as: “(1) an attempt to enable or allow the speech of the subaltern; (2) an attempt to find the authentic subaltern “self”; and (3) an effort to search for a “universal” or “cosmopolitan” subject.”⁶⁰ However, Spivak critiques all these alternatives as futile because of the “inaccessible blackness”⁶¹ of the subaltern. Her work itself is complicit in silencing the subaltern because of her elite role. She said, “I think it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting, in order precisely to be more effective in the long run. Our work cannot succeed if we always have a scapegoat.”⁶²

In the Philippine context, the subaltern can be equated with people groups that face marginalization, such as indigenous peoples, the LBGTQ community, HIV/AIDS positive persons, and the poor who are not heard in the larger society. The patriarchal structure of Philippine Christianity also renders women as subaltern. While it is true that these people have been speaking all along, their voices are unheard. Hence, instead of asking Spivak’s question, “Can subaltern speak?” a more

⁵⁹ Hall, “Whose Heritage?,” 31. The concept “in but not of Hong Kong” is adapted from “in but not of Europe” in Stuart Hall, “In but not of Europe: Europe and its Myths,” *Soundings* 22 (Winter 2002/2003).

⁶⁰ J. Maggio, “Can the Subaltern Be Heard?: Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,” *Alternatives* 32 (2007): 431.

⁶¹ Maggio, “Can the Subaltern Be Heard?,” 427.

⁶² Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999), 309.

meaningful question can be: “Can Filipino women’s voice be heard?” Additionally, “Will those in power listen?”

Postcolonial theologians of struggle are not theologians for the poor and marginalized; the poor are theologians. Aloysius Pieris, a Sri Lankan theologian, pointed out that the problem in theologizing is “Theologians are not poor, and the poor are not theologians.”⁶³ It is inevitable that theological articulations necessitate a basic theological foundation. Since the oppressed and marginalized peoples in the Philippines “cannot be heard” by oppressive globalization, it is the task of learned theologians to translate their voices. Postcolonial Filipino theologians are mere translators of the poor.

Conclusion

In this pandemic, Filipino theologians must come to grips with the necessity of doing a theology that will liberate people from many struggles. To accomplish such a task, theologians should construct postcolonial theologies and, urgently, articulate a postcolonial interpretation of the impact of COVID-19 in the Philippines, where this destructive reality must be engaged from contextual, contrapuntal, resistant, and subaltern perspectives.

Globalization, COVID-19, and postcolonialism are interconnected. The novel coronavirus that originated and infected thousands of people in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (hence, COVID-19), and was declared by the World Health Organization as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, has put globalization in lockdown in terms of restricting border crossings of people, goods, and services. Even movement of money was severely affected. In the Philippines, for instance, 10% of its GDP relies on overseas remittances. However, most Overseas Filipino Workers were also affected and were unable to send money to their families. If this pandemic persists, the way globalization is done will either adapt to this context or be killed. One article claims that COVID-19 will not doom globalization, but “the coronavirus could spur it onward, with high-value data processing replacing supply chains as the key facet of global economic exchange.”⁶⁴ Indeed, global supply chains will no longer be the same, and this scenario is an opportunity to resist its exploitative nature, particularly in the Philippines. Already, nationalist narratives are creating alternative discourse for globalization. Other analysts opine that COVID-19 will “precipitate

⁶³ K.C. Abraham, *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Differences* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 115.

⁶⁴ Chris Miller, “Analysis: Will COVID-19 Sink Globalization?” Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 22, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/will-covid-19-sink-globalization/>.

waning of globalization,”⁶⁵ “a major blow to globalization,”⁶⁶ and a “reshaping geopolitics of globalization.”⁶⁷

Like in all other pandemics, trade and commerce have played significant roles in the spread of viruses. As one commentator argues, “Globalization brought us COVID-19—and the tools to fight it.”⁶⁸ Globalization has also been paralyzed or shocked by the pandemic. COVID-19 has adversely impacted globalization, and it has also greatly affected the marginalized minorities in the Philippines, particularly millions of people living in slums of Metro Manila. These people are double victims of oppression and exploitation. A postcolonial interpretation of the pandemic can shape a liberating theology for the marginalized, especially during this time where vaccine nationalism appears to be a major priority of rich countries.

⁶⁵ Harold James, “Could Coronavirus Bring About the ‘Waning of Globalization’?,” World Economic Forum, March 4, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/globalization-coronavirus-covid19-epidemic-change-economic-political>.

⁶⁶ Ian Bremmer, “Why COVID-19 May be a Major Blow to Globalization,” *Time*, March 5, 2020, <https://time.com/5796707/coronavirus-global-economy/>.

⁶⁷ Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, “Will the Coronavirus End Globalization as We Know It?,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-03-16/will-coronavirus-end-globalization-we-know-it>.

⁶⁸ Tim Fernholz, “Globalization Brought Us Covid-19—and the Tools to Fight It,” *Quartz*, March 29, 2020, <https://qz.com/1818228/globalization-brought-us-covid-19-and-the-tools-to-fight-it/>.