

Theological and Doctrinal Terms Articulated in Filipino Language: A Pedagogical Approach in Religious Studies

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Abstract - *The efforts to communicate gospel values in the Filipino context and in its native language bring out an authentic inculturation as it ensures not only the relevance of the gospel but also the clarity of the message to the receptor culture. By articulating theology, Filipinos will be able to form consciousness, thought, and understanding of their faith in their own cultural way. The more we can communicate and express our faith through our native language, the more that our feeling becomes intensified, deepened, and sharpened. And because of deepened feeling and willing, Filipino Christians can actualize what their Christian faith requires them to do. Hence, the objective to make theology more understandable to Filipino Christians, teaching theology using the dynamic equivalence of Theological and doctrinal terms in Filipino language in the classroom setting can be an important tool in learning where individuals can encounter and enhance further their understanding of their faith. This will lead Catholic students to communicate, express, think, and discuss their faith using their own native language so as to live the faith they professed and to live by it in their own cultural way.*

Keywords: *Inculturation, Vernacular, Theology, Articulated Theology, Indigenous Categories.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Christian missionaries gave a considerable place in the culture and social context as a possibility of successful implantation of Christian faith to the indigenous. This process of transmitting the gospel had demonstrated the opportunity of using the culture and context as important elements and basis for spreading some aspect of the Christian faith and inculcating it not just to the very core of Filipino cultural way but also in the minds and hearts of the indigenous. By respecting, preserving and fostering the particular values and riches

of a people's cultural heritage, the Church is in a position to lead them to a better understanding of the faith, which is to be lived in concrete and daily experience of the people. Hence, there exists a harmonious blending between two different beliefs, the gospel and the traditional religion, in which a new Christianity is born in the process, that is, Christianity uprooting from the indigenous way of life of the Filipinos.

Inculturating the Culture

The process by which Christian faith is embodied and translated within a concrete historical and cultural situation is called inculturation. Leonardo Mercado defines inculturation as "a process of integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people, that in the process, the Church becomes part of the culture of a people." This essentially means that the Church is making her effort to communicate the gospel values in the context of the particular group to bring out an authentic inculturation and to ensure not only the relevance of the gospel but also the clarity of the message to the receptor culture. The Catholic Church is very convinced that by means of inculturation, she can effectively bring across the gospel and express it within the context of the people in order to identify it with their own culture. Thus, the Church, at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), called on the religious to adapt to the needs of the rapidly changing world, that by doing so, it will create a relation between the Christian message and cultures. This new paradigm of evangelization is the process of interaction between faith and culture, which is an ongoing discernment to discover Christ in other cultures that in the process of evangelization, the natural expressions and ways of the people will be given space to relate them to the Christian message. Furthermore, in the document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1974), it also specifies that:

“The Church makes the gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces people, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exists in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and more effective instrument of mission... She comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal.”

This was also evident in the Conciliar Document (72) of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, when the council saw the significance and purpose of inculturation, which does not seek to tear out the people’s culture, nor does it intend to just add the gospel (AG, 21; PCP II, 202-11), rather, as Pedro Aruppe (1978) puts it, is the effort of the Church not just to make the gospel relevant to the people but “ *in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about “a new creation.”*

The Use of the Vernacular in Expressing the Faith

With the objective of the Vatican II to communicate the gospel clearly and intelligibly to the people’s culture, the use of the vernacular was introduced. This is to say, the Catholics are to enjoy their own cultures and to pray in their own language. This resulted to the interpretation of faith in an indigenous way, that is, faith is interpreted, but with indigenous categories. Conversely, the culture is interpreted and translated in the light of the faith tradition. Thus, the change first occurred in the liturgy wherein the language of the people was given importance in communicating the gospel clearly and intelligibly. In the document *Sacrosanctum Concillium* (1963), the Church encouraged the different local Churches to use the language of the people in the celebration of the Eucharist and also in all liturgical rites instead of Latin. In the broader perspective, what really sets in is the secularization of the liturgy. The document recognizes the importance of language and culture in expressing the process of becoming rather than being a Christian. Hence, the use of the vernacular in liturgy is to ensure that the community of the faithful truly understands

what they profess and believe so that the Eucharist will be celebrated in the noble, concrete and daily experience of the people’s spirituality. As Fr. Anscar Chupungco noted, the liturgy must think, speak, and ritualize according to the local cultural pattern.

Articulating Christianity in Filipino essentially means that Christianity must be accepted into Filipino patterns of thought and behavior. Having been accepted into the heart of Filipino, the gospel works itself through the entire structure, changing, adapting and using all that it finds there in the culture until Christianity fully becomes a folk Christianity, that is, Christianity expressed in the Filipino cultural way. As Catholicism established itself in many parts of the land and continues to grow and is adopting authentic Filipino cultural beliefs and practices into its teaching, these phenomenon indicate that Christianity has totally taken root in Filipino culture and this Christianity becomes their own Christianity. Nevertheless, in order to ensure that Christian faith is totally embodied and taken root in our culture, there is a need to engineer a theology written and articulated in the language, culture and context of Filipino, that is, a theology expressing the original gospel message in Filipino cultural milieu to make it more intelligible. From it is born a new theological expression that is Filipino and Catholic.

Articulating Theology in the Filipino Language

This endeavor to articulate theology in the Filipino cultural context has been the task of Filipino theologians and scholars for several decades. The objective of our local theologians and scholars is to develop a theology that seeks to address concerns that are relevant to Filipino Christians. Articulating theology is an attempt to understand Christianity from a particular perspective, for the purpose of making it relevant and meaningful for those to whom it is addressed. It seeks to grasp reality as it is and to express it through categories significant for a particular group. This endeavor had seen a great significance and opportunity for Filipino Christians to express their faith in their own language that they understand fully and live the gospel as Filipinos. Since language is the primary means by which the practice of production and exchange of meanings occur in the culture, there is the necessity for cultural rethinking in theology so as to arrive at those native terms that coincide or at least converge with the conceptual meanings designated by the foreign terms in order to make the gospel understandable. For the purpose of communicating the gospel to a particular group, the Church must use the

language of the people. In fact, the Church already did this in the past when the early Christian missionaries first introduce the gospel in our land, they initially studied the language and alphabet of the indigenous, commonly referred to as *Baybayin* and *Alibata*, and the Roman Catholic Catechism was translated and written in 1593 by Fray Juan de Plasencia into the language of the indigenous. This was known as the *Doctrina Christiana*. With that, early missionaries gave a considerable place not only on culture; likewise, communicating and grasping the nuances of a local language helped them to carry on the gospel not just in conversation but especially to discuss Christian ideas and concepts. In doing so, with the use of vernacular, the gospel message found its place in the culture's life and existence for it to be heard and understood by the local people. However, to engineer a systematic search for native equivalents of Western thoughts current in theological discussions need a serious methodology. It is a question as to how far one can reinterpret such traditions and recast them within a Christian perspective. Hence, a process of philosophical discrimination must be instituted in order to sift through the various possibilities of the term that become the most apt to convey the meaning of the Western concept. Thus far, there are some foreign terms or concepts, which do not correspond to the indigenous categories and can only be expressed as it is; thus, the results are by nature tentative as they are established through the acceptance of the public at large. In this way, the search for the appropriate translation of Western concepts in Filipino cultural thinking, the maximum transfer of meaning should be as close as possible to their original meaning.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his theory of translation, suggests that a good translation has to have a perfect grasp of the meaning of what the people try to convey and in order to achieve that, the translator must immerse himself in both the target culture and its language. Schleiermacher's theory of bringing the reader to author challenges the idea of generalization. He is in favor of a total immersion in the target culture and language as well as thoughts of the original author on the translator's part but it should not be to the extent of losing impact of the original texture of the author's work on the reader. The idea of making the explicit where he prefers to be ambiguous goes into the territory of author-to-reader theory, which Schleiermacher does not favor as an option since, for him, it means to distort the unique sense peculiar to an author's linguistic and conceptual world. The conceptual worlds of both the

reader and the author are products of two different languages which are again products of two different cultures. For Schleiermacher, intercultural dialogue is the essential goal of the translation. He discusses with the issue of translation from a cultural perspective but that of the target one.

Theological and Doctrinal Terms Articulated in Filipino Language

Dionisio Miranda is the most prolific in the area of vernacular theological ethics. Miranda made a systematic search for native equivalents of moral terms current in ethical discussions. He argues that there is a need that Filipino moral thought to be Catholic and must be familiar with the tradition. Hence, the task of Filipino moralist is to seek to grasp reality as it is and to express it through categories significant for his particular group. Such endeavor is not beyond possibility according to Miranda because the fact that morality is a universal phenomenon implies that there is a residue in experience that is common to all. At the same time, since morality is rooted in a socio-cultural medium implies that the same reality can be interpreted from different viewpoints, articulated differently, and communicated at various levels of complexity.

The objectivity of cultural rethinking in ethics is to arrive at those native terms that coincide or at least meet with the conceptual meanings designated by the foreign terms, and to raise them to some kind of technical status in order for such terms appears to be the language of the people. The need to communicate the gospel values culturally, contextually, and in vernacular to Filipino opens to the path to Filipino theological ethics. This is because theology should always articulate the gospel values in a way understandable to the people. In the effort to communicate the gospel values in the context of the Filipino and in its native language is to bring out an authentic inculturation, it ensures not only the relevance of the gospel but also the clarity of the message to the receptor culture.

To exemplify this, Miranda argues that the proper translation for *ethics* is "pagkamakatao." He came up coining this term as a translation for ethics by initially posing the problem of how the word "moral" is to be rendered in Tagalog in order to pass on to the problem of how to render "ethical" in the same sense. By asking a question such as "Bakit dapat magpaka(moral)?" certain possibilities were allowed to emerge. The "moral" of magpaka(moral) could be rendered with equivalents such as *magpakabuti*, *magpakabait*, *magpakatino*, *magpakamatuwid*, *magpakatapat*,

magpakadangal, magpakalinis, magmagandang-asal, magmakapuri, at magpakatao, and so on. Through the process of elimination, he discovered that the most comprehensive translation for *magpakamoral* is *magpakatao*. Accordingly, the translation of ethics as “pagkamakatao” appears more than justified and appropriated because the word “pagkatao” coincides with the concept of character in an essentialist or even ontologically. Pagkatao is understood as the mode of being human. To make it more explicitly moral it might be better to speak of asal-tao (Human conduct) or more dynamically, pagkamakatao, thus, being human is the sense of being, behaving, and relating in a human manner.

In the Filipino context, ethics is understood as a personal ethics in contrast with the western view, which is basically metaphysical. This is because the Filipino vocabulary understands ethical value and ethical criteria as dimensions of the moral subject rather than as separate.

In 2001, the group of theologians and scholars of Maryhill School of Theology published a collection of theological and doctrinal terms articulated in Filipino Language entitled “Teolohiyang Doktrinal”. This theological endeavor of articulating theology with the use of Filipino language, culture and idioms has the purpose of using it as instructional material for explaining theology in Filipino way to the students. It is through the promotion and use of our language that we could shape and develop the emerging Filipino consciousness so that Filipinos could express, think, and live concretely as Filipino Christians. Likewise, they also believe that if students continue to make use solely of the English language in our theological discussion, they would continue to be under the skirt of Western thoughts and that their chance to express, think and live a fully Filipino Christians will diminish. By explaining theology in our own language to the students, they will not just understand the concept rather they will also realize how rich, distinct, vivid and colorful the Filipino language is and its idiomatic expression. Our language and consciousness are potent tools in shaping and transforming Christianity in our own cultural way for it to become Filipino Christianity.

Here are the samples of the theological and doctrinal terms articulated in Filipino Language and idiom:

Damdaming ng mga Mananampalataya / Sensus Fidelium: pananaw, puna, o nilolooob na bunga ng

mahiwigang pandama sa kaloob ng Diwang Banal sa buong katipunang kristiyano at sa bawat kasapi nito. Ito ay damdami lalo na ng mga kasaping madaling makadama o mas bukas sa pananahan at pagkilos ng Diwa. Ito ay maaaring pananaw, puna, pangsang-ayon o hindi pangsang-ayon sa isang gawain, pahayag, o pasiya ng pamunuan ng sandaigdigan o lokal na katipunan. Hindi ito kanakailangang maging damdamin ng nakararami.

Ginhawa / Salvation: ang kaloob ng Bathala na pag-ahon o paghango sa hirap, sakit, o kakulangan ng katawan, kalooban, at kapaligiran; ang kasapatan, kapatiran, at kalayaan na nilolooob ng bathala at nararapat pagsikapan ng tao sa daigdig. Sa pamamagitan ni Kristo, nababakas at tuluyang matutupad ang lubusang ginhawa, ang pagbabangong-dangal, ang kapatawaran ng mga kasalanan, ang pagkabuhay ng namatay, at ang bagong langit at bagong lupa.

Kagandahang Loob / Grace: ang pangunahing katangian ng pakikitungo ng Diyos sa sangnilikha at tumutukoy sa ganitong pagsasalarawan ng bawat pagkilos niya: mula sa kanyang kagandahang-loob at pagkukusa, gumagawa siya ng kapuri-puring bagay na hindi matutumbasan ninuman.

Karupukang Mana /Original Sin: Bahagi ng kalagayan ng tao sa unang sandali ng kanyang pagkapal: ang kakapusan ng kanyang sariling kakayahan na tamuhin ang buhay na ganap at tuparin ang kalooban ng Diyos; tinatawag ding kasalananang mana. Ito ay nangangahulugan na kailangan ng tao ang tulog ng Diyos at kapwa para matamasa ang ginhawa, at hindi sapat ang sariling pagpapsiya at matinding pagsisikap upang maging tapat sa Diyos at kapwa

Pagbabangong dangal / Resurrection: ang ginawa ng Ama na nagpapawalang-sala kay Jesus “sa ikatlong araw” pagkatapos ng nakakahiyang pagtatakwil at pagpatay sa kanya ng mga makapangyarihan; ang pagbabangon ng Diwang Banal sa kanyang dangal na tinatapakan, at ang walang-maliw na pagdakila sa kanyang mga gawa, pagsisikap, katauhan, at buong buhay; ang pagkabatid ng mga alagad na nananahan sa kanila ang kanyang Diwang matapat at mapagpatawad sa kabila ng kanilang kasiraang-loob noong siya’y kanilang pinabayaang at itinakwil sa panahon ng kagipin; pagbatak-dunog (Hiligaynon)

Pangangatawan ng Loob / Incarnation: ang habang-buhay na pakikinig, pagsasalooob, at pagsasagawa ni Jesus ng kalooban ng Diyos; ang habang-buhay na pagkakatao ni Jesus ayon sa Diwang Banal, mapagmahal at mapagpalaya; ang buong-pusong paglilingkod at pag-aalay ng kanyang buhay upang ipadama ang walang sawang kagandahang-loob ng Diyos; tinatawag ding pagkakatawang-tao ng Salita.

Pagsasadiwa / Spirituality: ang pagsisikip at pagsisikap na unawain at sundin ang pagkilos at pananahan ng Diwa ng daigdig; bilang tugon ng isang tao o ng isang pangkat sa udyok ng Diwang Banal; nakikilala ang kabuuang-anyo sa pagsamba, pagkilos, pag-aaral at pagsasabuhay.

II. SYNTHESIS

This method of teaching Religious Studies using the theological and Doctrinal terms articulated in the native language aims to make Filipino Catholics see the connection between the faith that they embrace and their ordinary lived experiences and concerns. This is the core task of inculturation - to make the gospel incarnated in the lives of the Filipino Catholics, that is, to reinterpret theology or faith in indigenous categories, understanding and expressing them by Filipinos and owning the tradition in their very own Filipino way, rather than mainly translating the tradition since genuine evangelization comes through the culture. This attempt to articulate theology from the perspective of Filipino language, culture and context, so as to make theology more understandable to the people, particularly to the students, will enhance their understanding and appreciation of the faith they are embracing now.

If one considers the total picture of the framework in which Christian faith is understood by many Filipino Catholics, one may evidently see a dichotomy between the Christian faith that they have embraced and the way they felt, thought, valued and behaved, and a Christianity that has been received without an intelligent grasp of the faith. For instance, many Filipino Catholics speak about the sacrament as simply receiving the sacraments to gain the necessary graces needed for salvation, they speak of sacraments as simply attending Mass, receiving the communion, and being anointed out of precaution. Hence, sacraments are seen as mere rituals, which are dispensed by the clergies. These expressions may give impression that, as far as holiness and spirituality are concern, the sacraments had been reduced to ritualistic

performances, which are perceived as meaningless, irrelevant and unconnected with the actual life and situations of the people.

Such dichotomy must be given an important attention in the Church. If something is meaningless to a person, it can hardly be part of the person's culture because meaning and rationality are crucial factors in any definitions of culture. If the experience and notion of faith are wrapped in a language that does not exist in the indigenous vocabulary of common, ordinary language, faith may become alien to the culture, fitted against the prevailing realities and experience of many Filipino Catholics instead of being inculturated within their frames of reference.

III. CONCLUSION

In view of proposing a pedagogical and theological learning and instruction for the Filipino students with an attempt to present a contextualized understanding of faith from the perspective of indigenous language, culture and context, this will help to utilize the indigenous concepts to be reappropriated to the understanding of Christian faith through Filipino thought intelligibly, recognizing and respecting the contextual dimension of the concepts. Thus, this will not only incarnate the Catholic faith in culture, but it will also allow this culture to be permeated by the gospel. Likewise, Filipino Catholics will be given opportunity to articulate their life of faith through a language close to their heart.

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