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Communication Theory And Catholic Liberation Theology

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COMMUNICATION THEORY AND CATHOLIC LIBERATION THEOLOGY

IT HAS BECOME A MATTER OF ROUTINE FOR US IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES NEVER TO ENGAGE IN A DIALOGUE, ESPECIALLY ABROAD BUT EVEN AT HOME, WITHOUT ASKING A FEW BASIC QUESTIONS ON THE NATURE AND CONDITIONS OF THE DIALOGUE ITSELF. KNOWLEDGE IS INSTRUMENTAL. "WHO WANTS TO KNOW WHAT AND FOR WHOSE BENEFIT", THEREFORE, IS THE GENERAL QUESTION. TO RAISE THIS QUESTION NOW MAY DISTURB SOMEWHAT THE IRENIC CLIMATE OF THIS GATHERING. ON THE OTHER HAND, FACING THIS QUESTION MAY PREPARE US TO A DEEPER BROTHERLY COMMUNION - WHICH IS THE AIM OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION.

BEFORE I GO ON WITH MY TOPIC, I WISH TO DWELL BRIEFLY ON THE IMPORTANCE FOR US OF A SYSTEMATIC CRITIQUE OF MEDIA-RELATED TERMS AND IDEAS.

MOST OF THE CONCEPTS OF COMMUNICATION THEORY HAVE BEEN CREATED IN THE RICH COUNTRIES, THE UNITED STATES, IN PARTICULAR. THEY CANNOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED. TO UNDERSTAND THIS, CONSIDER A LATE-COMER, THE CONCEPT OF A "BALANCED FLOW OF INFORMATION," WHICH WAS CREATED BY THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES AS MERE NEW WORDS. THOSE WHO COINED IT MEANT IT TO BE A PROGRAM; THOSE WHO OBJECTED TO THE PHRASE DID SEE IN IT A PROGRAM THREATENING THEIR OWN POSITION OF DOMINANCE.

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THE VOCABULARY, CONCEPTS, AND, ESPECIALLY THE THEORIES OF MEDIA ARE PART OF COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS SERVING THE INTEREST OF SPECIFIC ECONOMICS. IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR THE COMMUNICATION THEORIES PROPOUNDED BY THE WEST WERE CORRELATED TO APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT DESIGNED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CAPITALIST COUNTRIES. LET'S TAKE THE EXAMPLE OF THE "DEVELOPMENT THEORY", WHICH WAS CONCEIVED BY AMERICAN SOCIAL SCIENTISTS WITH THE ACTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT. IT GAINED POPULARITY IN THE PERIOD AFTER WORLD WAR II AND THE SUBSEQUENT ERA OF AMERICAN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, MILITARY EXPANSION IN THE WORLD. THE INTENDED PURPOSE WAS TO HELP THE RECOVERY OF THE WAR-TORN "FREE" COUNTRIES AND THE SPEEDY DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEWLY EMERGING POST-WAR NATIONS (I.E. THE THIRD WORLD).

THE CONCEPT OF "NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT" REACHED ITS PEAK OF POPULARITY IN THE MID-1960'S. THE PRIMARY CONCERN HAD BEEN TO EXPAND AND ENHANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH, AS MEASURED BY GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, DEVELOPMENT WAS THOUGHT OF AS A "PACKAGE" WITH ECONOMIC GROWTH AS THE MAJOR MOTIVATING FORCE: WHEN THE GOAL OF ECONOMIC GROWTH IS ACHIEVED, IT WAS ASSUMED THAT 1) ECONOMIC WEALTH WOULD TRICKLE DOWN OR SPREAD ACROSS DIFFERENT SOCIAL STRATA IN A SYSTEM; 2) ECONOMIC GROWTH WOULD BRING ABOUT COMPATIBLE CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS IN OTHER SPHERES. THEREFORE, ECONOMIC GROWTH WAS CONSIDERED AS A KEY TO A BROADER POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE THIRD WORLD, WHICH IN TURN WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE DETERRENT TO COMMUNISM.

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THESE TWO "LIBERAL" ECONOMIC ASSUMPTIONS CANNOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED. FIRST, EVIDENCE HAS ADDUMULATED TO SHOW THAT THE PURSUIT OF SUCH POLICIES MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE INCREASED THE TOTAL ECONOMIC CAPACITY (WITH SIGNIFICANT VARIATIONS AMONG THE THIRD WORLD NATIONS), BUT IT HAS, BY AND LARGE, CREATED OR REINFORCED THE ECONOMIC INEQUITY ACROSS DIFFERENT SOCIAL SECTORS. THE RICH GOT RICHER, THE POOR GOT POORER. OWENS AND SHAW (1974) CLAIM THAT, IN PURSUIT OF A DEVELOPMENT THAT PLACES PRIMACY ON ECONOMIC GROWTH, MANY THIRD WORLD NATIONS (SUCH AS THE PHILIPPINES) HAVE ADOPTED STRONG WESTERN CAPITAL-INTENSIVE AND URBAN CONCENTRATED BIASES, PRODUCED MASS UNEMPLOYMENT, AND WIDENED THE GAP BETWEEN THE HAVES AND THE HAVE-NOTS. IN LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA AND ASIA, THERE ARE ENORMOUS NUMBERS OF MARGINALS WHO LIVE ON THE EDGES OF THE NEW ZONES OF PROSPERITY. THIS IS WHAT THE BRAZILIAN SCHOLAR-PLANNER CELSO FURTADO (1973) CALLS "GROWTH WITH DEVELOPMENT".

SECOND, ECONOMIC GROWTH HAS NOT IMPROVED SOCIAL JUSTICE OR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION EITHER. ON THE CONTRARY, ECONOMIC GROWTH CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED IN SOME THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES WHERE STABLE AND STRONG POLITICAL REGIMES HAVE MANAGED TO MOBILIZE PARTICULAR MASS SECTORS (FARMERS OR LABORERS) AND SIMULTANEOUSLY EXTRACT OR "SQUEEZE" THEIR ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY AT THE EXPENSE OF THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS (SUCH AS IMPOSED LOW WAGES OR BANS ON STRIKES).

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SCHILLER (1969, 1977, 1974) AND NORDENSTRENG (1979) HAVE BEEN TWO OF THE FOREMOST PROPONENTS OF STRUCTURAL IMPERIALISM. THESIS. IT HAS BEEN THEIR BELIEF THAT AMERICAN INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT CONSCIOUSLY SEEK TO PROMOTE AMERICAN POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS BY FOSTERING A ONE-WAY FLOW OF AMERICAN VALUES TO THE REST OF THE WORLD. AT A CONFERENCE HELD AT THE EAST-WEST COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE IN 1976, SCHILLER PRESENTED A PAPER IN WHICH HE DISCUSSED THE PIVOTAL ROLE BY MULTINATIONAL MEDIA CORPORATIONS IN THE WORLD ECONOMIC SYSTEM. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT IN MOST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, AMERICAN ECONOMIC DOMINATION OCCURS "WITHOUT CENTRAL DIRECTION OR POLITICAL INTENTIONALITY ONCE THE UNDERLYING MODEL OF CAPITALISTIC ENTERPRISE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AND SET ON ITS COURSE." IF, HOWEVER, THE "HOSPITALITY" OF A COUNTRY BEGINS TO BE LESS THAN INVITING "INTENTIONALITY REPLACES THE LESS DELIBERATE PROCESSES OF CONVENTIONAL SYSTEM MAINTENANCE."

THE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

THE INFLUENCE OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS ON THE ECONOMY OF THE PHILIPPINES IS A PROBLEM OF INCREASING CONCERN TO US. THE ABUNDANT RESOURCES, CHEAP LABOR, REAL OR NON-EXISTENT LABOR UNIONS, INEFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS, AND TAX CONCESSIONS OF OUR COUNTRY PROVIDE A FERTILE CLIMATE FOR CORPORATE GROWTH. AND THE CORPORATE SUCCESS IN THE PHILIPPINES HAS BEEN ACHIEVED AT THE EXPENSE OF OUR NATION AND PEOPLE, THUS COMPOUNDING THE

POVERTY AND DEPENDENCE OF OUR PEOPLE, DESPITE THE CLAIM OF THE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS THAT THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED NECESSARY FINANCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL AND EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS TO PHILIPPINE ECONOMY.

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS CERTAINLY HAVE INTRODUCED NEW TECHNOLOGY TO THE PHILIPPINES, PARTICULARLY IN THE MINING AND MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES, WHERE THEIR ACTIVITIES ARE CONCENTRATED. IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT, HOWEVER, THAT THE TECHNOLOGY INTRODUCED IS MORE SUITED TO THE NEEDS OF THE MULTINATIONALS THAN TO THE NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY. THAT TECHNOLOGY IS LARGELY CAPITAL-INTENSIVE, THAT IS, GEARED FOR THE TYPE OF PRODUCTION THAT USES AS LITTLE LABOR AS POSSIBLE. IN COUNTRIES, LIKE THE PHILIPPINES, WHERE UNEMPLOYMENT HAS REACHED A CRISIS PROPORTION, CAPITAL-INTENSIVE TECHNOLOGY ONLY AGGRAVATES THE PROBLEM.

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS ALSO AFFECT OUR COUNTRY IN MORE SUBTLE WAYS. THEIR ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN, FOR EXAMPLE, EXERT A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE AMONG THE FILIPINO PEOPLE. SUCH CAMPAIGN CREATES NEW NEEDS AMONG THE RICH AND POOR FILIPINOS ALIKE--NEEDS THAT THE RICH CAN SATISFY THROUGH IMPORTS OR NEEDS THAT FOR THE POOR MUST EITHER GO UNMET OR MET AT EXHORBITANT PRICE. MULTINATIONAL ADVERTISING HAS HAD A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON OUR TRADITIONAL VALUES AND CULTURE. TELEVISION, RADIO, NEWSPAPER. AND MAGAZINE ADS BOMBARD US DAILY WITH MESSAGE "WEST IS BEST", THUS CREATING AND REINFORCING A SENSE OF INFERIORITY ABOUT

THE INDIGENOUS CULTURE VALUES AND PRODUCTS OF OUR COUNTRY.

BESIDES EXPROPRIATING PROFITS THAT RIGHTFULLY BELONG TO THE PHILIPPINES, ELIMINATING JOBS THROUGH CAPITAL-INTENSIVE TECHNOLOGY, AND EXTRACTING THE LABOR OF THOSE WHO HOLD JOBS AT BELOW-SUBSISTENCE WAGES, GLOBAL CORPORATIONS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO HUNGER IN THE PHILIPPINES PRINCIPALLY IN TWO WAYS:

A. THEY HAVE DIVERTED LAND THAT WOULD ORDINARILY BE USED TO MEET THE DOMESTIC FOOD NEED OF OUR PEOPLE FOR THEIR OWN COMMERCIAL USE; THEY HAVE DEPRIVED TRIBAL MINORITIES OF THEIR ANCESTRAL LAND.

B. THEY HAVE ALTERED THE DIETARY PATTERN OF THE POOR.

DURING A MINDANAO REGIONAL CONSULTATION HELD BY TRIBAL GROUPS IN THE PHILIPPINES LAST AUGUST 20-23, LOSS OF ANCESTRAL LANDS WAS THE CENTRALISS. SANON LOCO, A T'POLI TRIBAL LEADER WORKING WITH THE EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR TRIBAL FILIPINOS SAID THAT TRIBAL PEOPLE ARE PRESSURED BY LAND SPECULATORS, AGRIBUSINESS, LOGGERS, INDUSTRY, MINING, MISGUIDED DEVELOPMENT AND IN CERTAIN AREAS, MILITARIZATION. UNSCRUPULOUS CUTTING OF TREES BY LOGGING FIRMS AND FARM METHODS OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS CAUSE DEFORESTATION AND DESERTS, WILD LIFE DEPLETION, EROSION AND LESSENERD FERTILITY, ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCE AND DISRUPTION OF WEATHER PATTERNS. IN SOUTH COTABATO PROVINCE, A 170,000 HECTARE LOGGING CONCESSION IS DESTROYING FOREST LAND, WHILE LARGE CATTLE RANCHERS HAVE DRIVEN TRIBAL RESIDENTS FROM ANCESTRAL HOMES. THE ECTF SAYS TRIBAL MINCRITIES ARE THE POOREST GROUP IN THE PHILIPPINES, DUE

TO A HISTORY OF PREJUDICE AND NEGLECT, EXPLOIT TO. BEREFT OF EDUCATION AND OTHER BENEFITS OF DEVELOPMENT, THEIR IDENTITY IS MALIGNED AND THEIR CULTURE DISTORTED.

THE EFFECTS OF THE INCREASED CONTROL EXERCISED BY MULTINATIONALS OVER THE DOMESTIC FOOD INDUSTRY IN THE PHILIPPINES ARE BORNE OUT BY THE STUDY MADE BY LODEGAR, AN ECONOMIST. HE REPORTS THAT IN THE PHILIPPINES ALONE COCA-COLA AND PEPSI SUPPLY THREE-FOURTHS OF THE SOFT-DRINKS MARKET; GERBER PRODUCTS, 80% OF THE BABY FOOD; CARNATION, 85% OF THE EVAPORATED MILK. LURED BY CORPORATE ADVERTISING THAT PROMISES THE NUTRITIONAL VALUES, CONVENIENCE, AND PRESTIGE ASSOCIATED WITH FIRST WORLD PRODUCTS, FILIPINOS HAVE BECOME HOOKED ON AN ASSORTMENT OF PREPACKAGED, CANNED PRODUCTS FROM WESTERN COMPANIES. FILIPINO MOTHERS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE TRADED THE NATURAL BREAST-FEEDING FOR NUTRITIONALLY, INFERIOR, SYNTHETIC IMPORTED MILK. ALTHOUGH COKE AND PEPSI ARE FAR FROM NUTRITIOUS DRINKS, THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH YOUTH AND THE "GOOD LIFE" OF THE FIRST WORLD MAKES THEM HIGHLY MARKETABLE COMMODITIES.

TO SUMMARIZE: WORLD HUNGER, POVERTY, MISERY ARE PROBLEMS THAT CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD APART FROM THE LARGER PROBLEMS OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT. IT IS BUT ONE OF THE MORE VISIBLE PRODUCTS OF A WORLD ECONOMIC ORDER DOMINATED AND STRUCTURED BY THE ADVANCED CAPITALIST NATIONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF MAINTAINING THE STABILITY OF THEIR OWN ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS. THE ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS GOVERNING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THIRD AND THE FIRST WORLD ARE NEITHER "NATURAL" OR "INEVITABLE".

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THEY HAVE BEEN DETERMINED BY NATION STATES MORE CONCERNED WITH PROTECTING AND PROMOTING THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM THAN MEETING BASIC HUMAN NEEDS OR RELIEVING HUMAN SUFFERINGS. THIS IS A VERY CLEAR INDICATION THAN THE PHILIPPINES AND THE NATIONS OF THE FIRST WORLD ARE EXPERIENCING A PROFOUND CRISIS IN VALUES.

HOW DOES THE CATHOLIC LIBERATION THEOLOGY COME INTO THE PICTURE?

THE CATHOLIC "THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION" REFERS TO THE THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION THAT AROSE IN LATIN AMERICA IN RESPONSE TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC-POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF A CONTINENT IMMERSSED IN POVERTY AND MISERY, IN WIDESPREAD DEPENDENCY AND OPPRESSION. IT ORIGINATED IN LATIN AMERICA AS A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF MASSIVE POVERTY AND INSTITUTIONALIZED INJUSTICE AND OFTEN POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF REPRESSIVE MILITARY DECTATORSHIPS WHICH BLOCKED EFFORTS & HOPES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE.

DESPITE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES, THE PHILIPPINE SITUATION IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF LATIN AMERICA IN MANY WAYS. BOTH HAVE A SPANISH COLONIAL PAST. BOTH HAVE PREDOMINAUTLY CATHOLIC POPULATION.

THE PHILIPPINE SCENE

PHILIPPINE SOCIETY TODAY IS CHARACTEREZED AS DOMINATED BY EXTERNAL "NEO-COLONIALISM" (THROUGH THE MULTIVATIONAL CORPERATIONS)

TIONS) AND INTERNAL COLONIALISM (THROUGH DOMESTIC CAPITALISM AND FEUDALISM), BOTH OF WHICH SUPPORTED BY THE MARCOS GOVERNMENT, USE REPRESSIVE METHODS THAT KEEP THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN A STATE OF DEPENDENCE AND POVERTY. THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WILL NOT ACCEPT THIS ANALYSIS AND MAY EVEN BRAND IT AS COMMUNIST INSPIRED. BUT FILIPINO CHRISTIANS MAY ACCEPT THIS ANALYSIS PROVISIONALLY IN THE SENSE THAT IT MUST CONSTANTLY BE VERIFIED, INTERPRETED, EVALUATED, AND REVISED IN VIEW OF THE CONCRETE HISTORICAL PHILIPPINE SITUATION.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

ACCORDING TO A STUDY MADE BY PHILIPPINE SOCIOLOGIST, JOHN J. CARROLL, S.J., THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES CAN BE A VERY STRONG INFLUENTIAL CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND MORAL FORCE THAT COULD OFFER SOME SOLUTION TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC-POLITICAL CRISIS IN THE PHILIPPINES TODAY. FIRST, MORE THAN 80% OF THE POPULATION ARE CATHOLIC AND MORE OR LESS INCONTACT WITH ITS MESSAGE. THROUGH ITS THOUSANDS OF PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS SISTERS AND BROTHERS, LAY TEACHERS, CHURCH LEADERS AND WORKERS, THROUGH ITS NUMEROUS CHURCHES, SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS, THE CHURCH HAS A GIGANTIC COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK CAPABLE OF CARRYING ITS SOCIAL MESSAGE TO EVERY NOOK AND BARRIO IN THE PHILIPPINES. SECONDLY, AT A TIME WHEN OTHER INSTITUTIONS HAVE LOST CREDIBILITY, THE CHURCH HAS ENHANCED ITS MORAL AUTHORITY WITH THE PEOPLE ESPECIALLY WITH THE URBAN AND

RURAL POOR IN SOME AREAS AND THE VICTIMS OF INJUSTICE. NOT ONLY HAS THE CHURCH BEEN INVOLVED IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANIZATION, SOCIAL WELFARE AND RELIEF SPECIALLY IN RURAL AREAS, BUT IN THE LAST 15 YEARS WITH HELP OF THE CHURCH-RELATED SPECIAL-PURPOSE ORGANIZATIONS, IT HAS IN VARIOUS PLACES STOOD FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR SETTLERS, TRIBAL MINORITIES, POLITICAL DETAINEES, SMALL FARMERS, WORKERS AND FISHERMEN.

PROVIDING A FRAMEWORK AND INTEGRATING ALL THESE VARIOUS SOCIAL APOSTOLATES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CHURCH IS THE BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT WHICH AUGURS WELL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. FINALLY, THE CHURCH IS ALSO A "TRANSNATIONAL" ORGANIZATION WITH INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES WHICH CAN ASSIST THE CHURCH IN MANY WAYS.

IN THE PHILIPPINES TODAY THERE IS A VERY STRONG UNITED FRONT FROM THE LEFT WHICH OFFERS A PROGRAM AND STRATEGY TO "RESTORE DEMOCRACY" IN THE COUNTRY. IT EMPHASIZES SECTORAL ORGANIZING; ARE OPEN TO VIOLENCE, AND POLITICIZE EVERY ISSUE, I.E., RELATE IT TO THE "US-MARCOS DICTATORSHIP." IT IS OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THIS PAPER TO DISCUSS THE REASONS WHY THE CHURCH CANNOT SUPPORT THIS VIEW FROM THE LEFT. SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT THE CHURCH HAS A VISION OF MAN AND SOCIETY BASED ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH WHICH IS CONTRADICTED BY THE PRESENT PHILIPPINE SITUATION, IS DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF MARXIST COLLECTIVISM, CAPITALIST LIBERALISM, OR THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE, AND GOES BEYOND THE MIDDLE CLASS VIEW THAT THE SOLUTION TO THE PRESENT ECONOMIC AND

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POLITICAL CRISIS CONSISTS PRINCIPALLY IN THE RESTORATION OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH, AS AN IMPORTANT CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FORCE IN PHILIPPINE SOCIETY, CANNOT REMAIN "NEUTRAL" WHEN THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES ARE AT STAKE. THE CHURCH CANNOT BE INVOLVED IN PARTISAN POLITICS BUT MUST TAKE A STAND WHEN HUMAN DIGNITY AND BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS ARE VIOLATED. IF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT JUSTICE IN THE WORLD, THEN ITS EMBODIMENT IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT, THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH HAS SOMETHING TO SAY ON THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES FACING THE FILIPINO NATION TODAY ON HUMAN DIGNITY AND THE NEED TO SAFEGUARD IT IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; ON HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING, TO EXPRESS DISSENT; AND ON THE NEED NOT ONLY FOR A RETURN TO THE RULE OF LAW AND TO PERSONAL AND PUBLIC MORAL INTEGRITY BUT ALSO FOR A MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AND WEALTH AND FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES WHICH WILL BRING ABOUT A REASONABLE BALANCE OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY; ON NATIONAL AUTONOMY AND FREEDOM FROM FOREIGN DOMINATION OF THE MOST APPROPRIATE WAY OF BRINGING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE.

THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION: PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

TRADITIONAL THEORY BEFORE VATICAN II TENDED TO BE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE PROBLEMS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH AND PERHAPS NOT SUFFICIENTLY WITH THE PROBLEMS OF MANKIND, AND THE

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WORLD AT LARGE. THE GOAL OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY IS THE LIBERATION OF THE PERSON FROM POVERTY, CROSS INEQUALITY, INJUSTICE AND EVERY KIND OF OPPRESSION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY. LIBERATION THEOLOGY, THEREFORE, IS NOT ONLY A THEOLOGY OF OR ABOUT LIBERATION: IT IS PRIMARILY AND ULTIMATELY A THEOLOGY FOR LIBERATION.

IT AIMS AT THE CONSCIENTIZATION AND LIBERATION OF BOTH THE RICH AND THE POOR, THE OPPRESSOR AND THE OPPRESSED. THROUGH THE PROCESS OF CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING, THE RICH AND THE POWERFUL WHO MAY BE EXPLOITING THE POOR CAN BE LIBERATED FROM THEIR GREED AND THEIR ATTACHMENT TO POWER AND BECOME AWARE OF THEIR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP THE POOR AND TO CHANGE STRUCTURES THAT PERPETUATE INJUSTICE AND INEQUALITY. THE OPPRESSORS CAN EITHER FREELY CHANGE, SHARE THEIR WEALTH AND PRACTICE JUSTICE OR BE FORCED TO DO SO BY MEANS OF VIOLENCE. THE POOR, ON THE OTHER HAND, WHO ARE SUBMERGED IN A "CULTURE OF SILENCE" (CF PAULO FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED) CAN ALSO BE CONSCIENTIZED AND BECOME AWARE OF THEIR DIGNITY AS CHILDREN OF GOD, OF THEIR OPPRESSIVE SITUATION, AND BE LIBERATED FROM MENTALITIES, VALUES AND ATTITUDES NON-PROMOTIVE OF JUSTICE THAT HAVE BEEN DEEPLY INGRAINED IN THEIR LIVES DURING YEARS OF COLONIAL DEPENDENCY AND OPPRESSION. THEY HAVE IT IN THEIR POWER TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR DESTINY BY THINKING AND ACTING TOGETHER (I.E. THROUGH THE ORGANIZATION OF BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES BCC). BOTH RICH AND THE POOR NEED MORAL CONVERSION AND RENEWAL OF HEART. BUT THIS IS NOT ENOUGH. THERE IS NEED FOR THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH TO ADOPT A STRATEGY FOR RADICAL SOCIAL CHANGE.

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SHOULD THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH BE INVOLVED IN "POLITICS" THE ANSWER TO THIS IS YES AND NO. IF BY "POLITICS" IS MEANT GETTING DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN PARTISAN POLITICS, THE ANSWER IS NO. HOWEVER, IF THE MISSION OF THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH IS TO EVANGELIZE PHILIPPINE SOCIETY IN ALL ITS ASPECTS (SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, MORAL AND SPIRITUAL), THEN THE CHURCH CAN NOT BE NEUTRAL ON POLITICAL MATTERS. THE CHURCH HAS THE RIGHT AND DUTY TO SPEAK ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC-POLITICAL REALITIES WHEN THEY INVOLVE RIGHTS, MORALITY AND RELIGION. THE CHURCH MUST DENCUNCT AND PROTEST CLEAR CASES OF INJUSTICES. LIBERATION THEOLOGY AS A THEOLOGY FOR LIBERATION EXPLICITATES THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE SERVICE OF LIBERATION. THE DANGER OF USING THE FAITH, THE CHURCH, AND THEOLOGY FOR POLITICAL ACTION, IS ALWAYS PRESENT BUT THIS SHOULD NOT PARALYZE THE CHURCH INTO A STATE OF INACTION.

ONE OF THE GOALS OF ATENEO EDUCATION IS SERVICE OF THE NATION AND OF ONE'S FELLOWMEN, ESPECIALLY THE POOR AND THE OPPRESSED. HENCE, THE ATENEO IDEAL: MEN FOR OTHERS. IN THE WORLD TODAY WHERE MATERIAL GOODS ABOUND, MAN HAS BECOME HOMO CONSUMENS: MAN THE CONSUMER. IN A CONSUMER SOCIETY, THE SUPER-FLUOUS BECOMES THE CONVENIENT: THE CONVENIENT BECOMES NECESSARY: THE NECESSARY BECOMES INDISPENSABLE. HENCE, THE ETHIC OF CONSUMERISM: THE CENTRAL POINT--MYSELF: OTHER PEOPLE--THINGS TO SERVE MY PURPOSE: THE MOTIVE--PROFIT: THE MORAL NORM--EFFICIENCY: THE MEANS--WHATEVER WORKS. CHRISTIANS TODAY ARE CALLED TO PROTEST AGAINST THIS CONSUMERIST MENTALITY AND TO CREATE A NEW MAN--

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HOMO SERVIENS: MAN WHO SERVES. THIS IS THE NEW KIND OF SERVICE TO THE WORLD TODAY. THIS IS THE SPECIAL CALLING OF THE ATENEO GRADUATES. THE BEST EXAMPLE AND MODEL OF HUMBLE SERVICE IS JESUS WHO WASHED THE FEET OF HIS APOSTLES AND WHO PRACTISED FULLY WHAT HE PREACHED: "THE SON OF MAN HAS COME, NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, TO GIVE HIS OWN LIFE FOR RANSOM FOR THE MANY.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY ALSO AIMS TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE CULTURE OF THE RICH AND THE CULTURE OF THE POOR. THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY MEANS OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR. THIS SOLIDARITY DEMANDS A CHANGE OF CULTURE-- DECISIVE BREAK WITH THE DOMINANT ELITIST, INDIVIDUALISTIC, CONSUMERIST "BURGIS" CULTURE, AND THE RESOLUTE PRACTICE OF A POPULAR, MASS-ORIENTED, SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE, FRUGAL COUNTER CULTURE. THESE TWO CULTURES EXISTING SIDE BY SIDE ARE ALREADY REFLECTED AT THE ATENEO IN THE FACETIOUS DISTINCTION MADE BY THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES BETWEEN THE LIFE STYLE OF THE "SOCIALITE" AND THAT OF THE MORE "SOCIALLY" ORIENTED STUDENTS.

IN PHILIPPINE SOCIETY TODAY WHEN CORRUPTION HAS BECOME SO BAD THAT MANY TIMES HONESTY IS PUNISHED AND DISHONESTY REWARDED, IT IS NOT EASY TO PASS UP A MILLION PESO BRIBE OR TO GIVE UP WORKING IN A BUSINESS OR GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISE FOUND TO BE CORRUPT. BUT THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT THE GOSPEL OF LIBERATION DEMANDS FROM THE FILIPINO CHRISTIAN. IN THE AFTERMATH OF SENATOR AQUINO'S ASSASSINATION, CERTAIN NEWSPAPERS AND BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS WERE TARGETTED FOR BOYCOTT BECAUSE THEY WERE UNJUST STRUCTURES. THE LEAST THE FILIPINO CHRISTIAN CAN DO TO FIGHT INJUSTICE IS NOT TO COOPERATE KNOWINGLY AND WILLINGLY WITH INJUSTICE, NOT TO BE GUILTY OF

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COMPLICITY IN PROMOTING AND PROFITTING FROM UNJUST STRUCTURES.

THE MORE DIFFICULT CHALLENGE TO THE FILIPINO PEOPLE TODAY IS THE FIRM RESOLVE TO BECOME AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE-- NOT MERELY RESISTING UNJUST STRUCTURES AND ARRANGEMENTS, BUT ACTIVELY UNDERTAKING TO REFORM THEM. THIS CHALLENGE IS GIVEN TO FUTURE LEADERS IN ALL SECTORS OF PHILIPPINE SOCIETY. SOME OF OUR RECENT ATENEO GRADUATES WHO SET OUT TO REDUCE THEIR INCOME IN SO FAR AS IT IS DERIVED FROM PARTICIPATION IN UNJUST STRUCTURES FOUND OUT SOON ENOUGH THAT IT WAS WELL NIGH IMPOSSIBLE TO DO SO UNLESS THOSE VERY STRUCTURES ARE CHANGED.

UNJUST STRUCTURES CAN BE CHANGED BY PRESSURE FROM ABOVE BY THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CONSCIENTICIZED PRIVILEGED CLASS AND FROM BELOW BY THE SECTORAL ORGANIZATION OF THE OPPRESSED FILIPINO MASSES. THIS IS A SLOW PROCESS. THE OPPRESSED FILIPINO PEOPLE MUST FIRST REALIZE THAT THEY ARE THE PRINCIPAL AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND THAT THE ROLE OF THE FILIPINO PRIVILEGED CLASS IS TO ASSIST THEM--TO REINFORCE WITH PRESSURE FROM ABOVE THE PRESSURE EXERTED FROM BELOW ON THE UNJUST STRUCTURES THAT NEED TO BE CHANGED.

IN THIS AGE OF NEO-COLONIALISM, OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DOMINANCE OF A FEW COUNTRIES, OF THE CULTURAL HEGEMONY AND COMMUNICATION IMPERIALISM OF THESE COUNTRIES, WE MUST LOOK CRITICALLY INTO THE REAL SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FUNCTION OF THE FOREIGN PRESENCE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

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OURS IS AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM AND I SUBMIT THAT IT SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE PRESENT CONCERN OF BOTH THE DEVELOPED AND THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES REGARDING THE CREATION OF A NEW INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION ORDER WHICH IS ITSELF PART OF A STILL LARGER CONCERN, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MORE JUST ORDER. THE AWARENESS OF THIS LARGER CONTEXT GIVES TO OUR DISCUSSION A VITAL IMPORTANCE. THE CREATION OF THIS NEW ORDER IS PERHAPS "THE MOST RECENT INCARNATION OF THE MILLENNIAL CONCEPT OF JUSTICE." (ANTONIO PASQUALI).

IT IS ONLY LATELY THAT THE FILIPINOS HAVE FROM OBJECTIVE NECESSITY BEGUN TO IDENTIFY WITH THE THIRD WORLD. WE USED TO HAVE VERY LITTLE EMPATHY WITH LIBERATION MOVEMENTS. ONE REASON IS THAT OUR PERCEPTION OF WORLD EVENTS IS BASED ON AMERICAN MEDIA REPORTS WHICH INTERPRET INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LIGHT OF AMERICAN ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC INTEREST. VICTIMS OF CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION WE SUFFER A CRISIS OF IDENTITY AS WELL. THE RESOLUTION OF THIS CRISIS CAN BE AIDED BY A STRONGER IDENTIFICATION WITH THE THIRD WORLD FROM WHICH WE CAN LEARN VALUABLE LESSONS IN DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF OUR OWN AND IN BUILDING AN ECONOMY WHICH WE OURSELVES CONTROL.

THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WILL HAVE TO UNITED IN ORDER TO PREVENT WESTERN ECONOMIC AND CULTUROL CONTROL. A CULTURE BASED ON OUR NEEDS WILL EVOLVE ONLY AFTER WE LIBERATE OUR OWN ECONOMY. BUT LIBERATION OF THAT ECONOMY WILL ALSO BE HASTENED BY THE DEVELOPMENT IF ONLY IN ITS INITIAL STAGES, OF A CULTURE THAT IS BASED ON OUR NEEDS AND GOALS.

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WE SHALL HAVE TO WORK WITH THIS IN MIND AND HOPE THAT THE DECISION-MAKER CAN BE WORTHY OF OUR BEST EFFORTS. WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, WE ARE NOW THE MOST CRITICAL AND PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT SECTOR OF THE SOCIAL REFLECTION ON THE WAY THE WORLD IS DEVELOPING."

IN CONCLUSION, LIBERATION THEOLOGY, BASED ON CHRISTIAN FAITH, HAS A VISION OF GOD, MAN AND SOCIETY THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE MUCH TO THE CREATION OF A JUST SOCIETY. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT THERE IS NO SPECIFICALLY CHRISTIAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF SOCIETY NOR A CONCRETE CHRISTIAN PROGRAM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE, THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION OFFERS A HOPE OVER AND ABOVE PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND A TRANSCENDENCE THAT GOES BEYOND DEATH ITSELF. IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT, BESIDES ITS PROPHETIC ROLE OF CARRYING THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL TO THE PEOPLE AND OF PROTESTING AGAINST INJUSTICE AND THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CAN ASSUME A GREATER ROLE IN BUILDING UP A MORE JUST PHILIPPINE SOCIETY THROUGH A SPECIFIC STRATEGY AND STRUCTURE FOR NON-VIOLENT BUT REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL CHANGE.

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