

**The State of Human Existence and its Religious, Theological,
Philosophical, and Ethical Answers[†]**

“Whales and dolphins are not fearsome; they are more humane than humans.”

- Anonymous

I. Introduction

There was a fiction movie about the baboon that encountered a strayed alien creature. The mammal asked the alien creature, *“Why are you here on earth?”* The alien creature replied, *“I want to see humans.”* The baboon commented anxiously, *“Hooh, humans are very dangerous.”*

In the first hours of the year 2000, many people in the world welcomed warmly, excitingly, and optimistically the third millennium. As we are in the third millennium, we must expect more progress to be unveiled by human genius. But since the dawn of the historic humanity, the question remains the same whether the evolution or revolution of humanity’s thinking and consciousness, which parallel with the changes of physical, material, and natural milieu, gears towards the liberation of humanity per se. Thus, Christianity exists to look at seriously, think profoundly, and search of the ultimate answer to humanity’s excruciating vicissitude since time immemorial, i.e., the easing of life’s internal contradictions which are the scourge of extreme anxiety. Rhetoric and demagoguery cannot cure this agony of the human spirit. Only the renewal and purification of the human motive can heal the agony of the human spirit itself.

In facing the above-mentioned challenges, we must have a proper perspective to inform us whether we situate ourselves in the proper context of strife, whether we tread on a way of life that appeases the disorder of existence manifested in ecological disasters, corruption, dehumanization, crimes, injustices, and violence in this highly civilized, technical, and sophisticated era.

It is intrinsic in us to endeavor in order to live and survive. Every aspect of our life’s struggle subtly or obviously resolves contradictions in life. Our anxiety how to increase our food production reflects the contradiction between human genius and nature’s power.

II. Education for Faith, Character and Service: The Quest for a True Sense of Humanity

A. Fallacies of Achieving Ideal Humanity and Society

The exposure of humanity to formal education can still be judged as a superficial answer to ambiguous human history. For history tells us about the painful truth that the people accountable to the holocaust of God's creation belong to highly scientific, sophisticated, and technical civilizations: the adherents of the liberal or neo-liberal culture. We conventionally believe that through culture and civilization the human being attains liberation from his/her contradiction with nature. But the more humanity increases its knowledge, the more it increases its destructive potential. Albert Einstein comments on rapid technological changes in the twentieth century, *"Everything changes except the heart and thinking of man."* We must take note that Josef Goebbels, the chief propagandist of Adolph Hitler, had a Ph.D.

On the other hand, the anti-bourgeois liberal culture, which adheres to Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism, believes that radically restructuring the relationship between productive forces emancipates humanity. The principle of this anti-liberal culture has a Judeo-Christian undertone. For Judeo-Christianity stresses that the earth belongs to the Lord. Therefore, the earth's affluence must equally be partaken and enjoyed by all. But the avid reader of history cannot forget the slaughter of forty million Russians under the despotic Stalinist era in the name of communism. He/she cannot forget the killing fields in Cambodia devised by Pol Pot who ordered the execution of more than one million Cambodians in the name of socialistic or communistic agrarian revolution. The tyrannical regimes of Stalin and Pol Pot presumed optimistically that history attains liberation through a utopian vision.

In the other context, many adherents of Judeo-Christianity, while wrestling with above-mentioned secular ideologies, presume that the final answer to the perennial predicament in the world is to Christianize the world itself. But our Philippine history cannot forget the three-hundred-year oppression of Filipinos by Spaniards for the sake of the symbol of the Cross. It cannot deny the slaughter of eight hundred thousand Filipinos by American colonizers just to realize President William McKinley's divine vision in conquering our motherland.

Human liberation cannot be attained through the endless quest for ideal economic and political ideologies, nor can human emancipation be achieved through searching for alternative

religions. Human liberation pointedly departs from the question what is meant to be truly human. This identifies with the question what is meant to be divine.

The urgent question in the present is no longer how far we are with our achievements and inventions. It rather asks us how near we are to the essence of our humanity.

While we always conclude that culture and civilizations and the revolutionary perestroika of the means of economic production and distribution finally resolve historical contradictions, we ignore the cardinal issue that embraces all issues pertaining our survival and extinction. This means the mother of all contradictions is the tension between heaven and earth. The center of conflict in existence is the contradiction between God and humanity that anxiously attempts to reach the divine power for its own purpose by vehemently owning, exploiting, raping the mother earth, and oppressing fellow humans. This state of existence always reminds Protestants that they should not give up their own evangelical tradition which helps them unveil the total depravity of humanity. Only humanity's unconditional and total trust in Divine grace redeems humanity's total depravity.

B. Manifestations of Humanity's Fragmentation of Being or Irony of Existence¹

The tension between heaven and earth, between God and humanity, varies in its historical manifestations. To be more specific, the following describe the state of human existence, which contradicts the Divine, to be addressed theologically, philosophically, and ethically. First, in relation to economics and ecology, Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange have the following descriptions of the paradoxical condition of humanity:²

- i. The scarcity paradox: Our society, a society of unprecedented wealth, experiences an unprecedented scarcity.

¹ Related with the problem of sin, Paul Tillich also has his own descriptions of the problems of human essence and existence and their actual personal, ecological, and social consequences in my article "*The Social Theology of Paul Tillich and its Indigenous Reinterpretation in the Philippine Soil*," sp. Outline II, i.e., "*Tillich's General and Particular View of Humanity*." Or, see Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1955).

² Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 44-45.

- ii. The poverty paradox: Poverty is rising sharply in the midst of wealthy societies.
- iii. The care paradox: In the midst of more wealth, we have fewer opportunities to practice care than before.
- iv. The labor paradox: Our society's need for more labor is becoming critical even as unemployment rises.
- v. The health paradox: Even the level of health care has increased, our level of disease, is rising.
- vi. The time paradox: Despite the substantially more wealth, we have less and less time in our lives.

Though the above-mentioned paradoxes describe mostly the First World setting, but many of them also indicate in some respects in our own Third World setting, especially in the Philippines. Besides, they might also happen in Third World countries once the latter attain the status of the First World.

And second, another anonymous person describes the following ironies related directly to attitudes reflecting human values:

Where are we headed?
 We have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider freeways but narrower viewpoints.
 We spend more but have less; we have bigger houses and smaller families.
 We have more degrees and less sense, more medicine but less wellness.
 We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry too quickly.
 We stay up too late, get up too tired, read too seldom, watch TV too much, and pray less.
 We have multiplied our possession but reduced our values; we talk too much, love seldom and lie too often.
 We've learned how to make a living but not a life; we've added years to life, not life to years.
 We've been all the way to the moon and back but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor; we've conquered outer space but not inner space.
 We've done larger things but not better things.
 We've cleaned up the air but polluted the soul; we've split the atom but not our prejudice.
 We write more but learn less, plan more but accomplish less.
 We've learned to rush but not wait; we've higher incomes but lower morals, more food but less appeasement, more acquaintances but fewer friends, more effort but less success.
 We build more computers to hold more information, to produce more copies than ever, but have less communication.
 We've become long on quantity but short on quality.

These are times of fast foods and slow digestion, tall men and short character, steep profits and shallow relationships.

These are times of world peace but there's domestic warfare, more leisure and less fun, more kinds of food but less nutrition.

These are days of two incomes but more divorce, of fancier houses but broken homes.

These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throw-away morality, one night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheers to quiet, to kill.

It is time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom.

Indeed, it's all true, so good people, where are we headed? What do we have left?

III. The Dynamic Interrelationship of *Fides* , *Fortitudo*, and *Servitium*

The different descriptions of human predicament mentioned above are basically the concerns of faith. To look at them through the eyes of faith, the believing person must know the basic nature of faith itself from religious humanity in general and Christianity and Protestantism in particular.

The principle *sola fide* (faith alone) is one of the legacies handed over by Reformers to Protestant adherents. However, Protestantism does not pioneer the said principle. It only recaptures and revives the principle as one of the original supernatural virtues shaping and forming religions, especially Christianity.

Faith expresses itself in many forms, such as building institutions, serving as vehicles of expressing and perpetuating itself. In its expression and perpetuation, it cultures other values serving as the foundation of individuals and institutions such as character and service. Theoretically, Christian institutions promote faith, character, and service. At the same time, faith, character, and service preserve Christian institutions. Institutions and communities remain shaky in their foundations without faith, character, and service. But as what Leo Tolstoy said, "*Ethics without religion cannot last,*" faith expressing in character and service can be more purposeful and meaningful if it knows the nature of its Ultimate Source. Only sectarian institutions have this value. The values promoted by the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), which are courage, integrity, and loyalty, also express a certain faith. However, is the PMA able to recognize the transcendental source of the said virtues? In this sense, evangelical institutions, such as Southern Christian College (SCC) and Brokenshire College (BC), have theoretically chosen the right path

on the ground of transcending and going beyond the rhetoric of earthly virtues. However, they must faithfully preserve their prophetism in order to avoid the pride, presumption, and hypocrisy of being different from the rest.

Evangelical institutions have chosen the right highway of the future amidst the above-mentioned descriptions of humanity's fragmentation and irony of existence. They journey with God, the Eternal Ground of Being, through educating humanity for *Fides* (faith), *Fortitudo* (character), *et Servitum* (service). However, we need to be guided and informed on the cause that SCC, BC, and other evangelical institutions promote and fight for. The first pertains to the meaning of faith. In this sense, theology, which justifies religion reasonably, rechecks and reevaluates our current faith expressions, understanding, and presumptions about God. This discerns whether our faith expressions are still revelatory or they might become instruments to hide us from God. This assures us that the rebellious comment of Feuerbach, a Doctor of Theology turned into atheistic, perpetuates no more, i.e., "*Theology is anthropology.*"

The second is character or fortitude. This pertains to the strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or bear pain or adversity with courage. Erich Fromm, in citing Baruch Spinoza's notion, equates fortitude with courage which is an element linked with faith and hope.

Fortitude is the capacity to resist the temptation to compromise hope and faith by transforming them – and thus destroying them – into empty optimism or into irrational faith. Fortitude is the capacity to say “no” when the world wants to hear “yes.”³

As a kind of fearlessness, Fromm writes on courage:

The third kind of fearlessness is to be found in the fully developed person, who rests within himself and loves life. The person who has overcome greed does not cling to any idol or any thing and hence has nothing to lose: he is rich because he is empty, he is strong because he is not the slave of his desires. He can let go of idols, irrational desires, and fantasies, because he is in full touch with reality, inside and outside himself. If such a person has reached full “enlightenment,” he is completely fearless.⁴

In this sense, character needs to allocate power, authority, and influence to have strong and penetrating impact to all human activities.

³ Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope Toward a Humanized Technology* (N.Y., NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 14-15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

Perfecto Yasay, Sr. says, *“If you lose money, you’ve lost money. But if you lose character, you’ve lost everything.”*

There are many bases to achieve power, authority, and influence which character needs. They link with our levels of thinking, consciousness, and social circumstances which shape our destiny. There is power in the search for knowledge and wisdom. There is power in discipline in all dimensions of life. There is power in credibility which preserves our trusting with one another and our union. There is power in wealth that can be acquired through industry, frugality, and being resourceful. And there is power in our quantitative number reinforced by the quality of our humanity.

And the third cause that evangelical institutions promote is service. St. James says,

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and keeps oneself unstained from the world...What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can this faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 1:26-27; 2:14-17, RSV)

Aside from this passage from James, the whole Bible portrays that there are diverse ways to express service manifesting the human being’s worship of God such as giving more weight on Divine justice, humility, mercy, liberation of the oppressed, uplifting of the poor, etc. (e.g., Isaiah 58:6-7, Micah 6:6-8, Amos 4:22-24, Matthew 23:23). However, the said virtues paralleling James 1:26-27 and 2:14-17 perceived as good works must be balanced by the attitude motivated by love, grace, and faith (e.g. Ephesians 2:8-9). This prevents us to commit the sin of moral pride, aside from spiritual pride, pride of knowledge and power (Reinhold Niebuhr). That’s why St. Paul says,

If I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (I Corinthians 13: 3, RSV)

Love is the most important and at the same time the most abstract term in Christian vocabularies, especially in the area of virtue. Besides, it is always abused easily and is the most difficult to be lived up as the noblest virtue. It is the innermost center of Christian theology, philosophy, and ethics. Without it all our faiths and hopes fragment, disintegrate, and shatter.

Without it, our faiths and hopes only serve as our impetus to demean, dehumanize, and destroy our own existence as humans such as our sources and means of living, our personal and institutional reputation and, above all, the whole of life itself. Without it, we remain to be inventive and even become excellent in our faith and hope-motivated creativity. But this leads us to destructive creativity or self-destruction rather than creatively destructive or purely creative. Faiths and hopes never disappear; they just shift their objects of loyalty in practical mundane endeavors. But they cause the disappearance of life's essentials without the innermost center of Christian theology, philosophy, and ethics, which is no other than *chesed* in the Old Testament Hebrew, *agape* in New Testament and classical Greek, *caritas* in Latin and love in English.

However, the same with faiths and hopes, there are forms of love that fragment, disintegrate, shatter, demean, dehumanize, and destroy our own existence and alienate us from the very essence of our humanity. That's why Saint Augustine, in his book *Civitas Dei*, just simply classifies love into God's love and self-love. *Chesed*, *agape*, and *caritas* refer to and are synonymous with God's love which values the sacredness and dignity of each person, especially the unlovable and the undeserved to be redeemed. Self-love is synonymous with narcissism and egoism or egotism which is a person's denial and deprivation of others' worth. In its pride and unwillingness to forgive, in its denial and deprivation of other's worth, self-love deceitfully exploits noble cause, terms, and principles such as justice and self-sacrifice. It rides on the popular opinions and interests to make one famous. It is even willing to sacrifice one's self in the name of the pride of self-righteousness, vengeance, and prejudice without considering its destructive consequences to the affected – be it a hated and prejudged person's reputation or the beloved institution's reputation. It is willing to commit suicide not necessarily physical, but by self-destructive attitude just to totally destroy all parts or members of the community. It separates the common interest from the common good even it is its pleasure to satisfy the common interest. Related to self-love, a saying even goes on, "*Self-pity is self-centeredness and selfishness.*" Self-love therefore is the root cause of the perennial mundane crisis manifested through corruption, wars, poverty, etc. This relates to what Martin Luther King, Jr. writes,

You must come to see that a man may be self-centered in his self-denial and self-righteous in his self-sacrifice. His generosity may feed his ego

and his piety his pride. Without love, benevolence becomes egotism and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride.⁵

On the nature and specific categories of Divine love, St. Augustine comments:

The object of this love is not anything, but only God, the chief good, the highest wisdom, the perfect harmony. So we may express the definition [of the virtues] thus: that temperance is love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God; fortitude is love bearing everything readily for the sake of God; justice is love serving God only and therefore ruling well all else, as subject to man; prudence is love making a right distinction between what helps it towards God and what might hinder it.⁶

Aside from faith and love, hope must also shape our character or fortitude. Faith serves as the guiding principle of hope and love. Aside from its transcendental nature, which refuses to accept the present as God's will, hope sustains the power of faith and love (Romans 5:3-5; 8: 18-25).

With regards to hope's nature and its relationship with faith, Fromm writes:

Hope is *paradoxical*. It is neither passive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur. It is like the crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come. Neither tired reformism nor pseudo-radical adventurism is an expression of hope. To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime. There is no sense in hoping for that which already exists or for that which cannot be. Those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or for violence; those whose hope is strong see and cherish all signs of new life and are ready every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born.

Hope is the mood that accompanies faith. Faith could not be sustained without the mood of hope. Hope can have no base except in faith.⁷

Love purifies the motive and unifies our faith and hope. The just relationship within the human community preserves the unifying function of love. Also, the Christian Church Disciples, which is part of the rich tradition of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), leaves to us the slogan "*Faith divides, love unites*" and "*Love, not law; Christ, not creed.*"

⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 145.

⁶ George F. Thomas, *Religious Philosophies of the West: A Critical Analysis of the Major Figures from Plato to Tillich* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 89.

⁷ Fromm, 9, 14.

Our perennial historical crisis can be attributed to two tremendous factors: love without power and power without love (Paul Tillich).⁸

Our service cannot and must not be divorced from character. Character grounded on faith, hope, and love preserves the reputation of our service.

Service is part of the expression of our giving. But character makes giving not a duty, nor grudge, nor egoistic giving. It is thanksgiving to God that marks our genuine sacrifice.

In facing the challenges of the present and future, the virtues of faith, character, and service must be closely knitted. For faith without character and service makes our own Judeo-Christianity as only a religion of ceremonialism and apathy. Character without faith and service cannot endure. For faith belongs to the eternal “*Ground of Being*” (God). Service is the ground where we feel the “*Eternal Spirit*” (God). Without character and faith, service leads to the erection of idols. It praises the finite personality cults which usurp the power of the Infinite Creator behind the creation.

The evangelical institutions’ noble principles of faith, character, and service bridge the abyss of the fragmented relationship between the human being and God, between the human being and fellow humans, between the human being and him/herself, and between the human being and God’s creation.

IV. The Nature of Theology: The Rationalization of Evangelical Institutions’ *Fides, Fortitudo, et Servitum*

Faith and theology are within each other. In some languages they are just one and the same thing. For the sake of distinction, however, faith is the driving force of theology in order for the latter to have the courage to be in its expressions. Theology is the reasonable force of faith in order for the latter to be coherent in articulating and justifying its expressions. But for the sake of broader human freedom, which is the main concern of authentic theology, faith collides with theology if it is necessary. As what Immanuel Kant says, “*I have to destroy knowledge (or*

⁸ Cf. Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1954).

theology) *in order to give room for faith,*” faith either establishes and legitimizes or demolishes foundations.

Like any other discipline or vocabulary, theology cannot totally be understood without tracing back its etymology. First, theology is derived from the Greek word *Theos*, which means “*God*” or “*god.*” Second, it is derived from the Greek *logos*, which means the following: word, wisdom, knowledge, reason, study, understanding, etc. Therefore, theology means word, wisdom, knowledge, reason, study, and understanding of God.

In theology the *logos* is not understood trivially as how the “*logies*” of other disciplines are being used. First, for Barth, the Word, which is one dimension of the *Logos*, pertains to the following that correspond my comment:⁹ The Incarnate Living Word (Jesus Christ); The Written Word (Bible); and The Proclaimed Word (Preaching). The incarnate Living Word is no other than Jesus Christ. God Himself in Christ lives up and exemplifies His true being to humans. Love, especially *agape*, is God’s ultimate imperative to humans. God has deeply exemplified Himself how to actualize *agape* through Christ’s crucifixion. Christ was crucified outside of Jerusalem which symbolizes holiness. He died on Golgotha which symbolizes the place of the worst sinners, outcasts, marginalized, untouchables, etc., as his deepest expression of love and care for them (Hebrews 13:12-13). This implies that Christ did not die for any symbol or entity perceived as holy such as the church though Christ is present therein. Rather, Christ died for the whole world in order for the world itself be absorbed to God’s holiness (John 3:16-17). In other words, the church must not die for herself in order to preserve her being a true church. She must die for God’s ultimate imperative and its corresponding virtues other than faith, hope, and love or faith, character, and service that redeem and liberate the whole world as exemplified by the Living Word.

The Living Word, therefore, serves as a corrective measure to any ideology, which seems to appear as theology, presenting false categories of entity such as limiting the division of people into oppressed and oppressor, rich and poor, victims and victimizers, superior and inferior, etc., and acknowledging the oppressed, poor, victims, and inferior, as the only people of God or

⁹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 208.

righteous people. While the division of people into different classes presents some truths, it must consider the fact that the categorization of entities has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. In other words, the vertical dimension of categorizing entities portrays that dividing light and darkness, good and evil, righteous and unrighteous, etc. cannot be absolutely determined by one's position in life or conventional morality. Both the rich and the poor are either potentially best or worst evil once they attain enormous power, wealth, and fame. They are not exempted from the vices identified by St. Paul in Romans 1: 26-31 and Galatians 5:19-21, which are as follows: wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, gossips, slanders, hatred of God, insolence, haughtiness, boastfulness, invention of evil, disobedience to parents, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, ruthlessness, fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, drunkenness, carousing, etc. Were the World War II German generals more tyrant than Hitler who was just a German Army sergeant before the latter became a dictator? Who executed the more or less two million Cambodians during the Khmer Rouge agrarian revolution from 1975-78? Was it the bourgeois intellectuals or the group of less educated and poor peasants? Who was guilty of ethnic genocide in Yugoslavia that almost annihilated the Muslim Kosovars or ethnic Albanians and Croats in 1990s? Was it the capitalists traditionally perceived as oppressive by the socialists and communists or the Serbian nationalist Slobodan Milosevic who was the remnant of the Yugoslavian communists traditionally perceived as the vanguard of the oppressed peasants and proletarians?

While it is undeniably true that Jesus Christ, the Living Word, prioritizes the poor, deprived, and oppressed in addressing the economic and political conditions of the people (e.g., Luke 4:18-19, etc.), it is also undeniably true that He gives equal weight to persons in high social positions who unconditionally believe in Him (Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 7:1-10; 23: 50-56; John 19:38-42; Acts 10:1-33, etc.). However, there are also some portions in the Bible that Jesus never trusts all people who believe in his miracle. It is common sense that this includes the poor (John 2:23-25; 5:41-47; 6: 26). In this sense, genuine faith theoretically abolishes poverty, rights' deprivation, and oppression of the weak and marginalized. Practically, however, dreaming of the abolition of poverty, rights' deprivation, and oppression of the weak and

marginalized remains a political rhetoric without honestly surrendering to the moral imperative of the object of faith, i.e., God. While the Living Word symbolizes God's transformative presence in politics, economics, and culture, but the same category of the Word cannot be equated with any political and economic persuasion on the ground that human sin pervades all areas of life. The emancipation of the poor, deprived, and oppressed must lead to discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20). Or, making the poor, deprived, and oppressed disciples of the Word precedes their emancipation.

It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4, RSV)

Honestly living up by the Word leads to self-improvement, which is one aspect of liberation, aside from radical dismantling of unjust social structure. Self-improvement fills in and substantiates social privileges and opportunities. The dismantling of the unjust social structure only provides and prepares broad spaces for those who engage in self-improvement. The first twelve disciples and apostles of Christ only belonged to the marginalized classes or sectors. But due to their openness to enlightenment derived from the Living Word, they were able to achieve self-realization and self-actualization. St. Peter said to the lame,

I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. (Acts 3:6, RSV)

This parallels with the wisdom, which says, "*The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement.*"

The second category of the Word is the Written Word which is no other than the Bible. The Bible is not literally the Word of God. It pertains to the written record of the revealed words of God channeled in different ways, especially in different periods of the ancient history of God's people, which function as the fundamental reference for spiritual insights in both the present and the future.

Though the Bible was formed in the antiquity, the issue it addresses is the same issue that we confront in the present, i.e., the problem of how to overcome the fragmented relationship between God and humans, the human being and him/herself, the human being and fellow

humans, and the human being and the rest of God's creation. This makes its antiquity relevant to both the present and future.

However, since God says, "*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain*" (Exodus 20: 7), there must be some rules to be observed in preserving the sacredness of the Word. Barth said, "*The Word of God should not be understood literally but analogically.*" Also, Reinhold Niebuhr said, "*The Bible should not be understood literally but seriously.*"

Scholarly, there are three levels of consideration in studying the Bible. First, any text in the Bible reflects a certain social and historical context it addresses that can also become a source of spiritual instructions in the present. Second, any verse in the Bible represents a textual-literary type. Some biblical passages must be understood literally; others must be understood figuratively. The Bible does not reflect a single literary form; it is very rich with different types of prose (e.g., myth, legend, fable, parable, law, etc.) and poetry (e.g., Psalms, Proverbs, etc.). Any type of prose and poetry has its own rules of interpretation and reinterpretation that preserve the sacredness of the Word. However, all forms of biblical literature have no meaning without the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (I Corinthians 2:10-12, TEV).

Besides, to be more guided in understanding biblical texts, Barth wisely informs biblical readers that they must know which biblical verses that are either eternally or historically bound.

And the third consideration in understanding the Written Word is theological-doctrinal level. Meaning, each Biblical text or book describes and presents the nature of the only one true God manifesting in three modes of being, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as experienced by the people in biblical period and explained by the people of God in post-biblical period using the language of philosophy. The language of philosophy does not determine the contents of the nature of God in the Bible. It helpfully describes and explains the nature of God according to people's direct encounter with God Himself. The belief that God is the Creator, Redeemer or Liberator, and Sustainer accords with biblical people's direct experience with God. Also, philosophy describes and explains the nature of religious language embodied in different types of

prose and poetry in the Bible emphasizing God's transcendence and self-extendedness and message. For example, when the Bible describes God as the Father, does it mean that God is male or has sex? When the Bible says that God is our rock and salvation, does it mean that God manifests through the rock or the rock must be worshipped because it embodies God?

Since Barth asserts that the Word of God should be understood analogically, the divisions of the Bible have their own manifestations of God's nature. For example, Walter Brueggeman describes the corresponding nature of God in every general division of the Old Testament. First, the Torah, which is the first five books of the Old Testament, pertains to the *nomos* (law) of God. The Nabhim, which is the group of Old Testament prophetic books, is the *pathos* (feeling/emotion) of God. And Kethubim, the wisdom and other writings such as Psalms, emphasizes the *logos* (wisdom) of God. The *nomos*, *pathos*, and *logos* of God culminate and converge in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Jesus Christ plays the role of a lawgiver, prophet, and sage in the New Testament.

The third category of the Word, the Proclaimed Word, is no other than the preaching of the church. The task of the Proclaimed Word is to make the Living Word be concretely felt in the present by any given culture. The Proclaimed Word reinterprets and re-appropriates the meaning of both the Living Word and the Written Word to the present and future conditions of the world. The Proclaimed Word is not confined within the verbal preaching of the church. Any endeavor of the church that directly addresses and hits the main point of the existential questions of humanity in different historical periods is a sort of a Proclaimed Word extending the presence of the Living Word and substantiating the contents of the Written Word through the Spirit of the Triune God.

The Gospel according to St. John deeply roots the above-mentioned explanations of the categories of the Word by saying,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (1:1, 14, RSV).

Related to Barth's, Tillich summarizes the meaning of the Word through the following: God manifests in Itself; in creation; in the history of revelation; in the Final Revelation; in the

Bible; and in the Church.¹⁰ First, on “God manifests in Itself,” God has no beginning and no end though He is the beginning from which nature came into being and the end to which nature itself ultimately destines. “*God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’*” (Exodus 3:14) Second, God is present in nature though nature or creation itself is not God contrary to the pantheistic belief. Creation is the self-actualization of God. Without creation, especially the conscious humanity as its apex, God cannot be praised and worshipped despite His being real in and beyond the universe. Third, since God’s creation is an ongoing process making the worshipful humanity as its direct participant, God continuously reveals Himself in different historical periods through the prophets and sages, especially in the Old Testament. However, the New Testament and post-New Testament periods are also the loci of God’s revelations. The central New Testament message, i.e., God’s Final Revelation in Christ, which is Tillich’s fourth category of the Word, is the central norm of understanding the nature of God portrayed in His revelations in history. The fifth is the Bible which is the basic reference of understanding the nature of God and His revelations. Sixth, God’s manifestation in the church makes the church mediate to the world the presence of God. However, God’s works are intended for the whole world. Therefore, the church does not embody God, nor God embodies the world, though the church must reflect in herself, bear, and extend to the world the presence and meaning of God’s incarnation in Christ.

Second, the Logos pertains to the Wisdom or Knowledge of God which is beyond human knowledge/wisdom. The wisdom/knowledge of God is beyond our comprehension and expectation. St. Paul writes,

For the message about Christ’s death on the cross is nonsense for those who are being lost; but for us who are saved it is God’s power...For God in his wisdom made it impossible for people to know him by means of their own wisdom. Instead, by means of the so-called “foolish” message we preach, God decided to save those who believe. Jews want miracles for proof, and the Greeks look for wisdom. As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and non-sense to the Gentiles; but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For what seems to be God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.” (I Corinthians 1:18, 21-25, TEV)

¹⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 159.

Third, the *Logos* pertains to the Reason of God, which is also beyond the pattern of human reasoning and intellect such as the invention of logic that organizes orderly our thoughts. The Aristotelian logic we commonly use is mathematical. The logic of God has many paradoxes. For the Aristotelian logic, which is partially based on the dominant belief of ancient Greeks, the world of human beings differs from the world of God/gods. But the paradoxical logic of God says, “*And the Word (God) was made flesh and dwelt among us (human world), full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:14)

Fourth, the *Logos* means study/understanding. Theology is not study/understanding about God; it is a study/understanding of God. We cannot comprehend God without letting God’s Spirit to possess us. Theologizing cannot detach from the works of the Holy Spirit that breed faith which is prerequisite to theology.

V. The Meaning of Faith as the Prerequisite to Theology

A. Biblical Etymologies of Faith

The term theology is not Biblical. However, the Bible teaches us what must be our attitude in studying/understanding the will of God. Culture partially guides our attitude and understanding of God’s will. As a product of human intellect and creativity, culture has the dimension of language comprising symbol and meaning aside from wisdom and knowledge. Culture mediates and explains the meaning of faith through its relative signs, symbols, and descriptions.

The Bible, which describes the meaning of faith, undergoes different linguistic translations of the term faith. But the basic definition of faith in the Bible is derived from the Old Testament Hebrew and the New Testament Greek, i.e., “*trust in or reliance on God who is Himself trustworthy.*”¹¹

The Bible has the following Hebrew words for faith with their distinct descriptions:¹²

1. ‘*aman* – “to be true” or “be trustworthy”;

¹¹ E. C. Blackman, “*Faith*,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia in 4 Vols.*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al, (Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A., 1962)Vol. 2, 222-234.

¹² *Ibid.*

2. *'emet* – “truthfulness,” “fidelity,” and “faithfulness”;
3. *'emunah* – “firmness” and “stability”;
4. *niphal* – “to be true, solid, firm, trustworthy, and reliable”; and
5. *hiphil* – “the acceptance of someone as trustworthy or reliable.”

In short, this is the Old Testament Hebrew concept through which faith functions: “*God stands at the center; it is His initiative and faithfulness in the covenant and the subsequent history of Israel that allow His people to respond to His fidelity.*”¹³

There is only one word for faith in the Greek New Testament, i.e., *pistis/pisteuein*. *Pistis* or *pisteuein* is basically the same with *'aman*.¹⁴ But *'aman* is broader than *pistis/pisteuein*; *'aman* is the most profound expression describing faith in the Old Testament. As related to *'emunah*, this is the descriptive summary of *'aman*: “*fidelity to God as the sign of the righteous person. God alone can be the object of trust and faithfulness because He 'is my rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, shield, horn of salvation, and stronghold (Psalms 18:2).*”¹⁵

B. Latin Classics of Faith

Before the modern period, the Christian theology reaches its zenith of significance in society, especially its classical dogmas and articulations, in Greek and Latin soil. In this sense, faith cannot yet totally be detached from Latin perspectives and context. First, in Latin faith is derived from *fides*, i.e., “*the lively remembrance of primordial events that gave rise to it.*” *Fides* is not only information and knowledge. It lively remembers events in the antiquity, e.g., the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of God in Christ, which evoke trust and grateful obedience to God. In addition, *fides* is a dynamic reality that involves our being.

The second Latin root word of faith is *credere*, which means, “*something will hold to be true,*” e.g., creeds, dogmas, doctrines, etc. *Credere* is the cognitive content of faith.

And the third Latin derivative of faith is *intelligere*, i.e., “*the theology or reflection on beliefs, life, and practices of the church.*” *Intelligere* is “*faith seeking understanding.*” (St. Anselm)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Crederere and *intelligere* influence our practice, proclamation, worship, life together, witness, etc.

C. Levels of Faith

Faith has three levels.¹⁶ The first pertains to the mental ascent, i.e., the elevation of our knowledge on the nature of faith through diligent studies on the same. The second is the heart level which trusts and confides with what we believe. Besides, our feeling measures our honesty to the faith we know and think as rational and dependable. Also, our hearts push us to do what we believe to be true faith expressions. And the third is service that informs us that faith involves and extends our whole being, our inner selves, in relation to social, physical, and material environments. Thus, the Scripture says, “*Faith without works is dead.*” (2:17)

D. Strands of Faith

Helmut Richard Niebuhr discerns that faith has the following strands: loyalty and trust.¹⁷ However, we can also add obedience to strands of faith. Aside from God who is the innermost center of our faith, loyalty pertains to our truthfulness and faithfulness to the centrality of the cause we profess, e.g., searching and dying for truth, love, and justice as God’s main concern for the whole world and humanity. Our trust in the centrality of our cause firmly affirms God’s vindication of our faith in the end despite our experiences of uncertainty in the present. There are three basic elements of trust: acceptance, commitment and choice.¹⁸ Our unconditional obedience to the innermost center (God) is the proving ground of our loyalty and trust to our cause.

E. Modes and Relativism of Faith

Faith has the following modal characteristics: dynamic, contextual, and relative (e.g., Hebrews 11). H.R. Niebuhr identifies four ways of the relativity (or relativism) of faith.¹⁹ First, they depend on the partial, incomplete, fragmentary knowledge of the individual. Second, they

¹⁶ King, 134.

¹⁷ Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 45-229.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

are relative to the measure of one's faith and his/her unbelief. Third, they relate to the historical position that one occupies and to the duties of his/her station in the society. And fourth, they are concerned with relative values of things.

F. Types and Core of Christian Faith

Tillich classifies faith into two types.²⁰ The first type is ontological covering sacraments and mysticism. It has a law demanding subjection to ritual methods or ascetic practices. The second are moral types, which are juristic, conventional, and ethical, which demand obedience. The types of faith are grounded on the definition of faith as “*the state of being ultimately concerned which demands the total surrender of him (or person) who accepts this claim.*”²¹

But the core of Judeo-Christian theology, which is the point of departure of theology, is the *Shema*. It says,

Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...Love your neighbor as you love yourself. (Mark 12:29-31, TEV)

The *Shema* criticizes both ontological and moral types of faith.

VII. The Dialectical Relationship between Faith and Doubt in Theologizing

All branches of knowledge search for truth. The point of departure or method of in attaining the truth crucially determines the contents of knowledge. For the natural science, doubt precedes in discovering a certain truth which challenges the conventional presumptions of scientists. In theology faith is the prerequisite to the truth of God's reality. Any person can be a philosopher of religion even if he/she denies the reality of God. But he cannot become a theologian, who is also a philosopher of religion, without affirming the reality of God.

Our constant theological endeavor needs to check the convention of our church ministers and parishioners through preaching, Sunday school sessions, conferences, Bible study sessions, etc. Checking the convention of our ministers and parishioners implies doubt in the context of faith. Thus Tillich writes,

²⁰ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (NY: Harper and Row, 1963), 1-15, 55-73.

²¹ Ibid.

Every theologian is committed and alienated; he is always in faith and in doubt; he is inside and outside the theological circle. Sometimes the one side prevails, sometimes the other; and he is never certain which side really prevails.²²

A. Reasons to Doubt

For our conventional thinking, doubt within faith hinders believers to attain a mature faith. With my remarks, Robert McAfee Brown identifies several reasons why we doubt on our faith.²³ First, “*We doubt because we are willing to grow.*” We benefit from this doubt because it implies seriousness in judging the foundation of our faith that shapes our conduct. We want to soundly understand God so that we know how to build strong foundations and defenses of our faith. Genuine faith grows not only in terms of wisdom, knowledge, attitude, and skills. It grows in terms of power influencing and transforming life. Our willingness to grow in wisdom, knowledge, attitude, skills, and power is the practical or realistic way of dealing with life’s reality. For sometimes we are unaware that we think of having enormous and prestigious positions and responsibilities even though they do not correspond to our knowledge, personal skills, and potentials.

Second, “*We doubt because we fear that our faith is false.*” This is another bright side of doubt because it prevents us to be presumptuous with our knowledge of God or with what we know from a prestigious university. Thus, Tillich writes, “*There is no genuine faith without the shaking of the foundations.*” The truth of theology is relative though God is the Absolute Truth. There is no final theology though God in Jesus Christ is the Final Revelation. Every theological proposition only addresses a particular and unique setting.

The second reason to doubt implies that not all beliefs lead us to enlightenment and liberation. In other words, our honesty to our faith involves criticism on some of our presumptions and stereotypes that shape and determine our destiny. It is easy to place our faith in God in our minds, hearts, strengths, souls, and actions. However, do our actions, which express the belief in our minds and hearts, make our faith relevant in the ever-changing condition of the time?

²² Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 1, 10.

²³ Robert McAfee Brown, *Is Faith Obsolete?* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 86-115.

As what Jesus says, “*Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven* (Matthew 18:3),” we need to empty again and again our minds and refine and redefine our faith through raising new questions in all directions out of the old topic, i.e., God. Hence, St. Paul writes,

What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete – as complete as God’s knowledge of me. (I Corinthians 13:12, TEV)

Third, “*We doubt because we fear that our faith is true.*” A saying goes on, “*Truth hurts.*” Faith, which expresses God’s love and hope, involves the defense of truth, justice, and other noble virtues. To stand firm with the truth and justice of God, in some contexts, leads us to isolation. For a myriad of times the world, which includes the church, resists the truth and justice of God. To be in God’s truth means to be rejected by the world deeply conditioned by falsehood. However, the irony is that even those who obviously take side with falsehood claimed to be taking side in the absolute and unchanging truth.

Many Christians presume that being loyal to their own churches means loyalty to God. They do not know that their thoughts do not represent a sound theology. Rather, their thoughts represent a particular ideology catering human caprices and ambitions for fame, power, and wealth. That’s why the Protestant principle must always be distinguished from historical Protestantism (Tillich). Loyalty to the institutional Protestant church does not always mean loyalty to the Protestant principle. Loyalty to the Protestant principle means absolute allegiance to God and to his truth and justice supported by the sound understanding of the Bible amidst the ever-changing issues and questions of the time. True and honest prophets in the Bible criticize their own religious beliefs and practices. Christ himself criticizes his own religion which gives more weight on rituals rather than on the sense of humanity. Thus, Luther says,

A religion that gives nothing costs nothing; a religion that suffers nothing is worth nothing.

Fourth, “*We doubt because we fear that malevolence might be at the heart of things.*” In this sense, we can affirm that Christianity is good or Protestantism is good. But the question is, can we trust all Christians and Protestants?

The question how effective and sustainable is the church to evangelize the society is anchored on the honesty or purity of the intention of the church itself. The probable reason why many no longer believe in the church, which corresponds to doubt in God, because of the failure of the gospel bearers to live up the divine standard defined in the Bible. A saying goes on, *“If you want money, make religion.”* Or, a joke goes on, *“There are only three ways to get rich: to become a landlord, drug lord, gambling lord, and ‘praise the Lord.’”* The irony is, those who obviously make money out of making religion are more effective and assertive than honest preachers. This challenges the honest to be more assertive in proclaiming the truth of God to overcome skepticism on Christianity.

Furthermore, faith can be expressed in many facets of life such as through ideologies which are the superstructure of any social system. But it is hard to commit our lives to some ideologies due to the extremely negative outcome in actualizing them in history making. We can say that communism or socialism is a better alternative social system in the Philippines. But the realistic question is, can we trust the socialists and communists who killed more millions in the former USSR and in Cambodia than the avaricious and imperialistic capitalists? Can we trust the same movement in the Philippines who killed thousands of their own comrades whom they suspected as government’s deep penetrating agents? We cannot even totally trust our own fellow Christians and Protestants. How much more the socialists and communists who are seldom seen or can never be seen in the church presumed to be the teacher of sound virtues?

And fifth, *“We doubt because we fear that indifference might be at the heart of things.”* In this sense, we may ask why the world, especially the Christian society, remains to have many problems despite its hearing of eloquent and powerful preaching of God-sent people? Maybe preaching is more powerful than applying what has been preached. In relation to this, a saying goes on, *“Familiarity breeds contempt.”* Or another saying goes on, *“Action speaks louder than words.”* However, it could be unfair for those who strive for change to absolutely believe in these examples for the reason that only a little change becomes visible in some contexts despite the countless noble actions exemplified by those who strive to be faithful to their faith. This is the question of the mystery of human sinfulness we are struggling with. Human sinfulness always looks and finds excuses who must be the culprits of human beings’ miserable conditions.

B. Categories of Doubt

Aside from Brown's articulation of reasons to doubt, Tillich classifies doubt based on its different contexts of application.²⁴ The first is scientific doubt, which pertains to matters of empirical inquiry or logical deduction or methodology in gathering facts and information in the research. This is a permanent doubt built on the attitude of a scientist. The second is skeptical doubt, which is about the attitude of the person rejecting certainty, e.g., the correctness of doctrine. This is transitory doubt because not all the time the skeptics resist sound knowledge. The skeptics have the attitude of to see is to believe. And the third is existential doubt, e.g., the awareness of the element of insecurity in every existential truth, especially the one that involves risk. Thus, Tillich writes,

Every knowledge includes spiritual dangers. Every transition from potentiality of knowledge, which man has by nature, and actualizing it in time and space, is a dangerous thing. It is always dangerous spiritually... This is a tragedy of all mankind in which we all live, namely, we are driven to go to knowledge and we are barred. The prohibition of God is a warning that is in us, namely, the danger of the consequences. The priest is aware of the catastrophic consequences that criticism of holy traditions can have on the spirit of many people, but neither the prophet nor the philosopher can resign his vocation to fight for justice and truth even if sacred beliefs must be destroyed, as the prophets did... It is bad to avoid tragedy if the price is to avoid truth... But truth itself must be pursued even if tragedy follows.²⁵

VII. Branches of Theology

Aquinas popularized the concept of identifying theology with science during the medieval period, e.g., teleological and cosmological arguments for the reality of God. Friedrich Schleiermacher who classified the branches of theology during the start of modern theology distinguishes the study of religion from culture. But as human knowledge evolves, we can now hardly identify where to place theology as a science in different sciences, specifically social, physical, and natural sciences. Some scholars place theology in humanities since theology itself closely relates with philosophy that falls under humanities.

²⁴ *The Theologians at Work: The Common Search for Religious Understanding*, ed. A. Roy Eckardt (NY: Harper and Row Publisher, 1968), 131-135.

²⁵ Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society*, ed. and intro by J. Mark Thomas (GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 171-172.

Based on the etymology that science derives from the Latin *scientia*, i.e., “knowledge,” theology, which is a branch of knowledge, is also a science. But theology is and should not be assimilated to any branch of science because it has dimensions of transcendence and depth that solely belongs to the *Mystery*, i.e., God. Likewise, theology is a science because it relates with and uses all branches of sciences to objectify its view though it has also a subjective side of viewing reality. However, theology’s method of being scientific differs from secular sciences. What is important is that theology strives to be systematic and orderly as a body of knowledge while it listens to and addresses unsystematic voices, statements, positions, and principles from the “unknown” below.

With my personal brief remarks, Daniel Migliore classifies and describes the following branches of theology.²⁶

The first is *Biblical Theology*. This “studies in detail the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments that are acknowledged by the Church as the primary witnesses to the work and Word of God.” It informs us about the general theological substance of every division of the Bible such as Torah, Nabhim, Kethubim, Gospels, Pauline Epistles, etc. The general substance of every division of the Bible has social and ethical implications.

The second is *Historical Theology*. This “traces the many ways in which Christian faith and life have come to expression in different times and places.” This stresses that the Christian faith should be dynamic and contextualized.

The third is *Philosophical Theology*. This “employs the resources of philosophical inquiry to examine the meaning and truth of the Christian faith in the light of reason and experience.” This salvages theology from heteronomous superstition and dogmatism.

The fourth is *Practical Theology*. This “is concerned with the specific tasks of ministry such as preaching, educating, pastoral counseling, caring for the poor, and visiting the sick, the dying, and the bereaved.” Through institutional church’s programs and activities, it applies what we have learned from all branches of theology.

²⁶ Migliore, 9.

And the fifth is *Systematic Theology (Doctrinal or Constructive Theology)*. Its task is “to venture a faithful, coherent, timely, and responsible articulation of the Christian faith. Aside from refining, reinterpreting, and redefining the basic tenets of our faith, systematic theology checks whether our theological presumptions and practices still address the signs and questions of the time. For example, what is meant by salvation, as a central theme in the Bible, in the society that is in a revolutionary situation?”

VIII. Basic Theological Questions

From the evangelical point of view, Migliore outlines the following basic questions of theology.²⁷

- A. Are the proclamation and practice of the church true to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ attested in scriptures?
- B. Do the proclamation and practice of the community of faith give adequate expression to the whole truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ?
- C. Do the proclamation and practice of the community of faith represent the God of Jesus Christ as a living reality in the present context?
- D. Does the proclamation of the community of faith lead to transforming praxis in personal and social life?

IX. The Theological Public

Though genuine theology plays the role of being non-conformist to any human situation, it must immerse in the same condition. However, theology has a proper venue where it operates and becomes orderly in its functions and articulation. In this sense, David Tracy invents the term “public of theology” which has three aspects.²⁸ The first aspect of the public of theology is the church where theology primarily functions. Aside from the venue where the Divine providence is felt, the church is the arena where the dialogue between God and the world through the Word is

²⁷ Ibid., 9-13.

²⁸ Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Post-Modern Theology* (NY: Touchstone Book, Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1984), 149-158.

being mediated. This is participated by clergy, parishioners, and the Bible through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The second aspect of the public of theology is the academe or seminary. The seminary is the depository of ancient and recent documents concerning the essence of Christianity. Aside from training students to become professional clergy in knowledge and skills, its function invents and provides proper methods, perspectives, and terms in mediating orderly the dialogue between God and the world through the Word.

And the third aspect of the public of theology is our society. The society is the proving ground how sincere we are in our witness to the reality of God finally revealed in Jesus Christ through our ethics that shapes our human relations and pervades our whole existence.

X. Formative Factors of Theology

With my personal and additional comments from other theological authorities, John McQuarrie discerns that there are at least six formative factors of Christian theology.²⁹ The first is experience. This is about “*the awareness of something that happens to somebody, namely, the state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence.*”³⁰ Our being grasped by the Spiritual Presence drives us to involvement. Our theology never matures and it never be strengthened without our participation in God’s activities and our open minds to reflect with and upon our activities. Reflections with and upon God’s activities cover our testimonies about our personal encounters with God working in our personal and community life.

The second is revelation. This pertains to the unveiling of the mystery of God through God’s own initiative alone. It has two types: the general and special revelations. The general revelation pertains to the indirect unveiling of God’s Being, e.g., through God’s creation. It is the ground of natural theology by using reason or philosophy as the point of departure of theology. It pertains to “*channels by which God has made himself known through nature – not physical*

²⁹ John McQuarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 4-8.

³⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 221 ff.

nature only, but the common, openly observable aspects of human nature as well."³¹ Psalms 19:1-4 and Romans 1:18-23 are popular examples of general revelation in the Bible.

As the product of general revelation, natural theology means the following:

It is simply a natural knowledge which man gets through the medium of created reality, and therefore is completely different from the supernatural knowledge of God which is only possible by means of supernatural special revelation.³²

The special revelation concerns about God's direct self-disclosure to selected people in many ways, e.g., Abraham's Theophanic Experience, Moses' Burning Bush Experience, St. Paul's road to Damascus Experience, etc.

Millard Erickson also has his own explanations about the nature and distinction between general revelation and special revelation.

...general revelation is God's communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places. It refers to God's self-manifestation through nature, history, and inner being of the human person...Special revelation, on the other hand, involves God's particular communications and manifestation of himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations which are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings.³³

General revelation has three loci.³⁴ The first is nature.

General revelation is most frequently thought of in connection with the amazing and impressive character of the creation, which seems to point to a very powerful and wise person who is capable of designing and producing intricate variety and beauty. The person who views the beauty of a sunset and the biology student dissecting a complex organism are exposed to indications of the greatness of God.³⁵

The second is history, e.g., the preservation and survival of God's chosen people, such as both the ancient Israel and the Christian church, amidst historical adversities, vicissitudes, and turbulences. This is both mysterious and wondrous because of the question and fact that God's

³¹ Georgia Harkness, *Foundations of Christian Knowledge* (NY: Abingdon Press), 85-94.

³² Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), 62.

³³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Manila, Philippines: Christian Growth Ministry, 1997), 153-154.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

chosen people continuously persist in their existence amidst the rise, fall and disappearances of great empires. If God is unreal in this sense, the said chosen people could have been totally gone with the total fall and disappearances of great empires. Empires only lasted for decades and centuries, but God's chosen people have already survived for millennia.

And the third is the constitution of the human being, which has three parts. The first is seen in the human being's physical structure and mental capacities. The second is in the moral and spiritual qualities of the human being that God's character is best perceived.

...The moral imperative requires the postulates of life hereafter and of the divine guarantor of values (Kant).³⁶

And the third locus of general revelation is the human being's religious nature.

In all cultures, at all times and place, humans have believed in the existence of a higher reality than themselves, and even of something higher than the human race collectively.³⁷

Georgia Harkness outlines the characteristics of special revelation that takes place through the following.³⁸

- A. Religious experience, Christian or otherwise, as distinguished from experience in general;
- B. Particular individuals – the prophets, saints, seers whom God chooses as His special channels;
- C. Particular individuals, who thus receive what is not accessible to all;
- D. Special media outside the regular order of nature, which are therefore regarded as miracles;
- E. A unique revelation in Jesus Christ; and
- F. Christ alone to Christians only.

We can categorize the special revelation as having the following stages. The first stage is the preliminary revelatory periods. This talks about how God revealed his will to humanity

³⁶ Ibid., 155.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Harkness, *Foundations of Christian Knowledge*, 88.

through the Patriarchs, Moses, succeeding prophets' experiences, etc. The second stage is the final revelation, which is no other than Jesus Christ himself, his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. And the third stage is the post-earthly Christ revelatory periods. This pertains to God's continuous work via the Holy Spirit descending upon God's believers after Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. This corrects our presumptions that there are no more revelations after the final revelation via the Christ Event. However, the final revelation, which manifests both the divinity and humanity of Jesus, serves as the central norm of doing theology. It means the following.

- A. The total revelation of God's Being – God's will for us – in Jesus Christ. How Christ relates with humanity and the whole world totally manifests and embodies how God intimately relates with humanity and the world.
- B. Jesus Christ is the authentic example of the spirit of humanity in relation to the Divine. The way of Jesus, which includes virtues, exemplifies the will of God for humanity.
- C. The humanity of God in Jesus Christ is the gracious and providential act of God Himself. It revives the Image of God in human persons. In this sense, the portrayal of God as the "Grand Inquisitor" who punishes the outcasts and sinners has been subverted and replaced with the insight that God even suffers and dies with and for the people treated as worthless. And
- D. History is and must be one for all Christians. This means, the humanization and the spirit of humanity and divinity must prevail regardless of different stages and development of civilization the Christians belong.

The special revelation is the point of departure of the reformed evangelical Protestantism to which the UCCP belongs. However, the UCCP has also the liberal side of its theology that also considers the general revelation as an object of theological reflection.

Revelation has two dimensions, the objective and subjective sides, which complement each other. The concrete and lively memory of God's events recorded in the Bible belongs to the objective dimension of revelation. The subjective revelation pertains to the mysterious works of

the Holy Spirit that enable us to believe in God and affirm the truth of the objective dimension of revelation.

Because revelation did not end in the earthly Jesus, it also pertains to new insights in the present life. The new insights in the present life convulse, enlighten, liberate, and reshape our foundation and outlook that determine our behavior, lifestyle, well-being, and destiny. They must be derived from moral insights gained from above-mentioned stages of revelation attested in the Bible. In this sense, the special revelation serves as foundational for our social philosophy and personal and social ethics. Migliore's articulation of revelation either subverts or legitimizes and strengthens our social philosophy and personal and social ethics through the following propositions.³⁹

- A. Revelation refers to God's own self-disclosure, i.e., God "*graciously takes the initiative and freely communicates with us.*" It is "*a gift that comes to us rather than some discovery about God, the world, or ourselves that we might have made entirely on our own.*"
- B. Revelation "*points to particular events and particular people through whom God has communicated in decisive ways with humanity.*"
- C. Revelation "*calls for our personal response and appropriation, i.e., it seeks the response of the whole person. True knowledge of God is a practical rather than a merely theoretical knowledge.*"
- D. Revelation is always a "*disturbing, even shocking event. It disrupts the way we have previously understood God, the world, and ourselves.*"
- E. Revelation "*becomes the new interpretative focus of our understanding of God, the world, and ourselves. It does not narrow our vision or constrict our search for understanding.*"

Likewise, Harold Cooke Phillips systematizes the meaning of revelation similar to its above-mentioned explanations.⁴⁰ First, God revealed Himself "*in the external world – in nature, such as what the Bible says, 'The heavens declare the glory of God.' (Ps. 19:1)...For the*

³⁹ Migliore, 24-25.

⁴⁰ Phillips, 110-118.

invisible things of him since the creation...are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity (Romans 1:20 A.S.V).''

Second, God revealed Himself in history through the following:

- A. Mighty Acts (e.g., Ps. 145:4,5) through the following examples: deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai, the impact of the prophets, the birth of the Master, the founding of the Christian Church, the voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers, who, like Abraham of the old, *“went out, not knowing whither he went (Heb. 11:8).”*
- B. Operation of God’s moral laws within which man must work out his destiny (e.g., Romans 11:12). There is *“trustworthiness of the universe in which we reap what we sow.”*
- C. Through the great personalities of history, e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, etc.

The third formative factor of theology is the Scripture. The UCCP Statement of Faith states that the Bible is *“a faithful witness to God’s Self-revelation in the history of His people, God’s inspired instrument to illumine, guide, correct, and edify His people for their faith and witness.”* As the Written Word, the Bible can also be perceived as within the context of revelation because revelation itself expresses the Word. But stories of revelation in the Bible usually fall under the special type. However, the crux is which among different meanings and descriptions of the word occupies the highest authority. Luther stresses by saying, *“apart from the Holy Spirit the Scripture is empty.”* Also, Luther says, *“Jesus Christ is the bible within the Bible, the most important key to the whole Biblical message.”*

The God who acts the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the highest norm in understanding and interpreting the substance of the Scripture. However, this still needs scholarly and sound understanding of the Scripture. Biblical reflections in the church must be the interplay of the Holy Spirit, Biblical scholars, and believers. The purity of the hearts of believers serves as the fundamental criterion of knowing God (Matthew 5:8).

The fourth formative factor of theology is tradition. Tradition is derived from the Latin word *tradere*, i.e., *“to hand over.”* In theology, however, there must be a distinction between

the Biblical (Prophetic and Apostolic) Tradition and cultural traditions. The Biblical Tradition, which is transcendental and dynamic, is derived from Divine revelations judging and transforming relative cultural traditions. Cultural traditions are purely human creations that either totally divorce from or transmit and mediate Divine revelations through liturgical celebrations.

Aside from liturgical celebrations mediated by culture, tradition concerns about the customary point of departure of our theological method. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC), which inherits Aquinas' scholasticism, traditionally starts from natural theology through observing the ways of nature and philosophy or reason (general revelation). The point of departure of Protestant theology is the special revelation attested in the Bible and mediated by the Spirit of the Triune God. The special revelation checks and purifies the general revelation. Besides, the Protestants inherit this slogan from Reformed foreparents: "*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*" (i.e., "*A church reformed, always being reformed.*"). The reformed evangelical Protestantism preserves the tradition of inner criticism. It is open to the constant renewal in the hands of God. It interrogates the theology of the status quo with the premise that any theology that does no longer question itself is not theology at all. A theology that does no longer question itself is the fusion of ideology and idolatry.

Theoretically, the Roman Catholic traditional authority in determining theology and ethics is the Church itself, especially through the Pope and the Magisterium, to be imposed by its hierarchy. Roman Catholics must wait what God says through the Church hierarchy. The Protestant traditional authority in determining theology and ethics is directly derived from the Biblical message immediately available to all Christian adherents mediated by other formative factors of theology. Protestants directly refer to the Bible related to the question what must be the will of God to humanity. Sociologically, it is the social structure (laws of social relationship or forms of government) that determines the contents of theology in RCC circles. It determines the contents of the Church superstructure or philosophy, ideology, arts, and theology. The Church superstructure strengthens the structure and controls the substructure or dominant composition of the community, especially the masses or members.

The social superstructure determines theology in Protestant circles. The same social level either legitimizes or breaks and constantly transforms social structure and substructure.

The fifth is culture. From the perspective of secular anthropology, culture has profound meaning and comprehensive in its coverage; it involves religion. However, from the theological point of view, religion distinguishes but does not separate from culture. From H. Richard Niebuhr's discernment, the religion of revelation, especially Christianity, does not always harmonize with culture. With my corresponding brief remarks, H. Richard Niebuhr draws different lines of the relationship between Christianity and culture through the following typologies.⁴¹ The first is *Christ against culture*, a contrast, even a separation, between Christ and culture. The cultural expressions condemned by the prophets in the Bible are idolatry, injustices, legalism, hypocrisy, and superstition. They are expressed in the list of vices in the New Testament such as in Romans 1:26-31 and Galatians 5:19-21. Ultimately, the said cultural expressions lead to the destruction of humanity and the earth. The culture of Christ defends the quality of life and harmonious human relationship. It does not unite with and participate in any human activity degrading life and human dignity. In the bible, there are only two cultural choices: the culture of life and the culture of death. The *Christ against culture* means no to death and destruction

The second is *Christ of culture*, a Christ totally assimilated into culture, a Christ who has become identified with culture. There are cultures that are originally non-Christian. However, since their values are essentially synonymous with Christ, they can be harnessed to advance the Image of Christ. Before, many Christians could hardly accept Greek philosophies due to the latter's pagan origin and propagators. But since there were known Greek philosophers who willingly died for values synonymous with Christ's, such as Socrates, this convinced some great Christian thinkers to acknowledge the importance of philosophy in defending Christianity. Later, Justin martyr fused Christianity and philosophy by concluding that Christianity itself is the best philosophy. Also, Origen, the genius Christian thinker, radically concluded that even Socrates was a Christian because of the latter's willingness to die for truth. This was despite the fact that Socrates was born before Christ. This means, the *Christ of culture* Christianizes the humane pagans and harnesses some pagan practices that are useful in propagating Christianity. The

⁴¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, 45-229.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity rapidly grew in number and gained strong foothold in Eastern Europe due to her preservation of the Eastern European aesthetic culture such as paintings and arts that beautified their church architectures. Eastern Europeans understood that this enterprise elevated their identity as distinct people. This drove them to be Christianized. Therefore, Christianity must be one with aesthetic culture whether the latter is Christian or non-Christian. This is because Christianity is basically aesthetic aside from its being religious and ethical.

The third is *Christ above culture*, a Christ who comes before culture and takes precedence over it. Jesus says, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.*” (John 14:6, TEV) Aside from its emphasis of Jesus’ divinity, especially the phrase “*I am,*” this claim of Jesus implies that culture is a way of going to our ultimate destiny, i.e., God. On the other hand, God through his final revelation in Christ is Christianity’s point of departure of culture. In its historical expression, this does not mean that religious institutions and their authorities must dominate any social structure. Rather, culture, such as legal systems, must ideally start from and end in Divine laws. It must ground on, root in, and be purposed in the Divine.

The Gospel tells us that Christ violates some cultural entities in order to give room for human freedom and harmonize and broaden human possibilities. Giving more weight on Christ than culture means that culture itself must be tested in its utility, usefulness, and presumptions by higher and nobler principles deriving directly from Divine sources such as truth. The way or culture of Christ is no other than the truth and the life. Any culture, which claims to be Christian, is not Christian or spiritual at all if it unwillingly undergoes testing in its utility, usefulness, and presumption. (I John 4:1) The *Christ above culture* means defending the sacredness of truth and life. In this sense, the evangelically founded Silliman University (SU) has truly found her true meaning through her philosophy acknowledging Christ as the *via, veritas, vita* (or *way, truth, life*).

The fourth is *Christ and culture in paradox*, a participation of culture coupled with a relativization of its importance. Luther’s two-kingdom theory, specifically the paradox of the law and the Gospel, is one example of the paradoxical relationship between Christ and culture. Luther urges Christians to be law abiding. This does not mean that any law, especially the legal

and moral system, is perfect or infallible. Any earthly law must undergo criticism as a way of testing its relevance, dependability, viability, and effectiveness. The Gospel's role criticizes both personal and social life and both the inner and outer human being. This covers the legal law. While the Gospel criticizes, refines, and attempts to replace the legal law, the former must warn believers to remain observant of the latter until it is replaced. This is for the reason of preventing anarchy or for the sake of smooth transition. But because the Gospel belongs to the eternal, it continuously criticizes and refines the legal laws of both the church and the state that only belong to the temporal. This prevents the irresponsible formulation and implementation of the legal system by the unscrupulous people such as the circumnavigation of the law.

And the fifth is *Christ as transformer of culture*, a conversion of culture to Christ. Christ's claim of himself as being the way, truth, and life ultimately aims for cultural transformation (II Corinthians 5:16-17). In this sense, transformation means changing the purpose, meaning, and aim of culture. For the Christian perspective, culture purposively and meaningfully aims to praise the Divine (Ecclesiastes 12:12-14).

The *Christ as transformer of culture* means the unity of human effort with the Divine endeavor as exemplified in Divine-human unity in Christ.

Without God, man cannot; without man, God will not. (St. Augustine)

In this sense, culture liberates the human being rather than assimilating the latter to the former.

Furthermore, culture pertains to the appropriation of symbols, wisdom/knowledge, and meaning (by theology) of and for particular people as mediums of conveying the Word. This is exemplified through the enculturation of theology in order to make theology itself more understandable to particular and distinct cultures, tribes, and races, aside from preserving their uniqueness, humanity, and dignity. The enculturation of theology indigenizes and contextualizes religious symbols in worship. Culture mediates the dialogue between God and the world through the Word.

Bong Rin Ro identifies two aspects of the contextual theology related to the role of culture in theologizing.⁴² The first is methodology. This means "*the Christian message must be*

⁴² *What Asian Christians Are Thinking?: A Theological Source Book*, ed. Douglas Elwood (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1976), 51-52.

expressed in national, cultural patterns, liturgical setting, church music, dance, drama, and building structures.” The second is the content. For example, this argues *“that God’s revelation comes to us in the Scriptures through specific form. In the New Testament they say God revealed his truth through Christ of Nazareth who lived at a particular time of history.”*

There are several approaches to indigenize and contextualize theology.⁴³ The first is syncretism. This is the *“mutual acceptance of each other’s beliefs,”* e.g., *“recognition of Christ’s divinity (by a Hindu adherent) as an avatar (incarnation) of the Supreme.”* The second is accommodation. This *considers prevailing cultures and religious practices and accommodates good ideas from other religions.* The third is situational theology. Here, God takes Himself every human situation as His own through His loving and forgiving spirit even the experience of those whom we perceive to be our worst enemies. And the fourth is Biblically oriented Asian theology. This identifies Biblical passages appropriate to particular Asian issues.

And the sixth formative factor of theology is reason. This pertains to the sound, orderly, and logical articulation of the theology shaped by experience, revelation, Bible, tradition, and culture. Reason preserves the integrity of all formative factors of theology. Likewise, it defends the validity of our theological articulation.⁴⁴

Basically reason is important in philosophy. In a common sense it is, like wisdom, synonymous with philosophy. But in the context of theology, reason has an ambiguous role. Historically it has either a dynamic or hostile interaction with religion. The Bible itself mentions this ambiguity. It has an aspect that stresses love of wisdom that implies valuing reason or philosophy since philosophy itself means *“love of wisdom.”* It is common to our hearing that the basic criterion of having knowledge and wisdom is to fear the Creator (Proverbs 1:7) that corresponds to our being careful in how to deal with the reality of life in giving order to life itself.

⁴³ Ibid., 54-57.

⁴⁴ Tillich also leaves to us his notions and categories of reason sp. in my article *“The Social Theology of Paul Tillich,”* outline IV, 33rd stanza.

The Johannine Gospel's Logos theology implies that God is identical with reason. It is the synonym of the *Logos* itself aside from word, wisdom, knowledge, etc. The Humanity of God in Christ is the reason (or *Logos*) incarnate (John 1:1-14). To be with God in Christ means to be within reason which is the ground of freedom. On the other hand, being with God in Christ transcends reasons. This means there must be a distinction between divine reason and human reason. That's why St. Paul says that Christianity must not trust earthly wisdom or reason (I Corinthians 1:18-31).

Both philosophy and theology agree that the concept of God evolves. Philosophy's basis of the evolution of God is grounded on the evolution of human consciousness and experiences that shape a concept. This is by mere speculation driven by the gift of reason that is inherent in human person. Theology considers human consciousness and experiences taking place in history. The language and symbol of theology are culturally conditioned. If philosophy attains its zenith in a given culture, proper and formal order through reason determines theological articulations.

Reason, as the ground of freedom, has become an object of suspicion by Christian circles throughout centuries. Metaphysics is one factor that forms, shapes, and motivates reason. It becomes the normative ethics for earthly life. The problem is there are varieties of metaphysics that correspond to the conflict between loyalties, aside from the tension between interests. Besides, is our view of reality identical with how God must look at the world that embraces the question of human freedom? Since worldview becomes normative to ethics, it affects the way we view and exercise freedom.

In other words, the human being who is endowed with reason transcends his views and needs to look for an alternative to the present life. Part of which is revelation.

The problem is, the same with the question of the nature of reason, how do we understand the nature of revelation that delivers salvation and liberation to humankind and the whole cosmos?

In relation to truth as a way to freedom, reason must be internally coherent in its articulation of any issue. It basically aims to let us experience proper order of life. But since there are varieties of worldview that create conflict between loyalties and interest, it implies internal contradiction of the whole structure of reality. In this sense, reason has not yet matured

in its function. Besides, the whole structure of reality is internally incoherent because the human person who is endowed with reason, as a gateway to freedom, has overlooked that truth only functions relatively, that there is (to use William James' popular phrase) plurality of the universe in terms of idea.

Furthermore, reason limits its context of operation. Usually in the academic milieu, such as in formal thesis writing, a person must have objective reason through the use of logic, specifically the deductive and inductive types. But in some informal and non-formal discussions, there is what we call synthetic logic popularized in the modern period by Hegel through his concept that attempts to reconcile and find common ground between the old (thesis) and new (anti-thesis) notions actualized in the historical process.

Reason, in a common sense, has been perceived as functioning to give proper order to life. However, the question remains to what extent that reason will be actualized in order to assure us of harmony and meaning which reason itself ultimately aims. Thus, we need to consult and identify some authorities on giving concept to reason's function in human existence. One of them is none other than Kant whose name has been misinterpreted for many years in theological circles with his "*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*" and his dictum "*Dare to think for yourself.*"

Contrary to conventional understanding, Kant's concept of reason does not necessarily deviate from revelation. It quests for proper understanding of revelation that supposedly accompanies reason. As a validation of this premise, Kant writes in his "*Religion within the boundaries of Mere Reason,*"

Regarding the title of this work (since doubts have been expressed also regarding the intention hidden behind it) I note: Since, after all, revelation can at least comprise also the pure religion of reason, whereas, conversely, the latter cannot do the same for what is historical in revelation, I shall be able to consider the first as a wider sphere of faith that includes the other, a narrower one, within itself (not as two circles external to one another but as concentric circles); the philosopher, as purely a teacher of reason from mere principles of *a priori*, must keep within the inner circle and, thereby, also abstract from all experience."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 64.

In short Kant stresses that

between reason and Scripture there is, not only compatibility but also unity, so that whoever follows the one (under the guidance of moral concepts) will not fail to come across the other as well.⁴⁶

Kant's "*Conflict of Faculties*," has described reason as avoiding encroachment of one faculty or division of knowledge into the other in terms of its nature and functions. While dichotomizing their concentrations, different areas of knowledge maintain their web of relationship. This means putting things in proper perspective and context in relation to the roles and functions. Thus, Kant writes:

So the biblical theologian (as a member of higher faculty) draws his teachings not from reason but from the Bible; the professor of law gets his, not from natural law, but from the law of the land; and the medical expert does not draw his method of therapy as practiced on the public from the physiology of the human body but from medical regulations.⁴⁷

Furthermore, via the moral law, Kant revolves his definition of reason around goodwill, freewill, and duty that complement each other.⁴⁸ This autonomous principle has a revelatory or evangelical undertone due to its dimension of inner criticism (goodwill) where the human being exercises his freewill and duty. The trinity of reason closely relates to the following significant virtue left to us by Kant:

Now I say man and generally every rational being exists as an end and must never be treated as a means alone.⁴⁹

Aside from revolving around goodwill, freewill, and duty, reason in this sense does not function for the sake of rationalizing. However, the danger is that Kant seems to be optimistic that all human beings harness their gift of reason in order to make it coherent and become a strong defender of human dignity. Goodwill, freewill, and duty only serve as criteria to judge whether reason prevails in our day-to-day undertakings. To affirm human dignity as a universal moral value does not mean that all human beings have harnessed their gift of reason even if they

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 251.

⁴⁸ *An Immanuel Kant Reader*, ed. Raymond Blakney (NY: Harpers and Brothers, 1960), 164-186.

⁴⁹ From Pepita Haezrahi's article "*The Concept of Man as End-in-Himself*" in *Kant: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Wolf (USA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 291.

adhere to rationalism. But to protect the dignity of a person is to let himself sharpen and elevate the status of his inherent reason, raising his consciousness through informal, non-formal, and formal education. Therefore, we can classify reason into active and dormant in the human mind. This depends how the human being treats the gift of freedom inherent in him aside from the question of his environmental circumstances that greatly affect both his gift of reason and freedom.

In other words, we can also reverse Kant's phrase "*Religion within the Boundaries of Reason*" into "*Reason within the Boundaries of Religion*," especially the religion of revelation such as Christianity. Revelation keeps on informing the reasonable human being that no matter how far the knowledge he/she has explored for broader freedom and possibility, mystery remains in the depth of reality. Even St. Paul himself, who directly experienced revelation at the road to Damascus, confesses humbly to Corinthian church that he knows only in part (I Corinthians 13:11-12). To be truly reasonable human in this sense is to humbly accept our limitation and finitude as part of our existence.

The comment of Wolfhart Pannenberg on Kant's principle is dubious that the latter's concept of autonomy results in plurality.⁵⁰ Plurality in society exists due to the following factors. First, it is inherent in society due to the individual person's uniqueness. Second, it is due to injustices that manifest the immaturity of the gift of reason among individuals in society. And third, it exists because of the failure of human beings to elevate their consciousness through incessant openness of their being to honestly quest for ultimate reality breeding unity. The second and third propositions turn plurality into pluralism.

The crux in Kant's principle that assures the preservation of unity in society is the giving of due respect to the dignity of human person and the purity of his/her action's intention. What Kant means by his dictum "*Dare to think for yourself*" protests against and departs from the absolute monarchs' and powerful church authorities' attitude that curtails the freedom of citizens

⁵⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmens Publishing Co., 1991), 177.

to have broader possibilities as prerequisite to freedom itself.⁵¹ Besides, the dictum manifests the modern and enlightened individual who must be characterized by three principles.⁵² First, each person must be independent in his thinking. Letting others think for him/her betrays his/her humanity. Second, a person must learn to put on the shoes of others in the quest for truth and knowledge to prevent narcissism threatening the community spirit that is part of his/her being. And third, the dictum is an invitation to consistent thinking, e.g., avoidance of double standard value.

Related to Pannenberg's comment on Kant's principle, Christianity's symbol of Trinity is not hostile to plurality. While the Father symbolizes God's universality and while the Son symbolizes God's particular actions in history, the Holy Spirit signifies diverse expressions of God's activity in society (Gordon Zerbe). Diversity, which is basically biblical, marks and preserves Christianity's catholicity from the following threats to humanity's reason and freedom: classism, sexism, racism ethnocentrism, etc. (Acts 2:1-11; I Corinthians 12:4-12, etc). Karl Jaspers is the other authoritative thinker who defends the importance of reason. He describes reason's nature and functions through the following selected quotations. First,

The new thinking is the age-old one which thus far has not penetrated far enough to form and guide communities of men: it is reason; it is philosophy. Philosophy has to arouse, to encourage, and to realize itself...Our advice is to engage in the philosophizing that is part of true humanity, that has been embodied through the centuries in great philosophers whose acquaintance we would desire for anyone who has leisure and wants to reflect – and how much free time is available to all of us, excepting managers and fanatics and the exploited victims of despotic regimes! Philosophy alone yields clarity against the perversion of reason. Philosophy alone confirms, broadly and deeply, the human content which everyone harbors within himself, seeks in reflection, and finds in the realization of his existence.⁵³

In this statement, reason almost identifies totally with philosophy. Philosophy is the embodiment and tool of reason itself to guide and give meaning to human consciousness and existence. In this sense, Jaspers looks at reason or philosophy positively as foundational to

⁵¹ C. Hughs. "Immanuel Kant" [article on-line] available from <http://www.wabash.edu>; Internet, Accessed Nov. 7, 2002.

⁵² Denis Dotton, "Dare to Think for Yourself," MQR Home Page [article-on-line] available from <http://www.wabash.edu>; Internet, Accessed Nov. 7, 2002.

⁵³ Karl Jaspers, *The Future of Mankind*, trans. E.B. Ashton (U.S.A.: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 209.

human freedom even though it has not yet reached its maturity in general human consciousness. The danger of this notion is that it somehow overlooks theology in his premise that “*Philosophy alone yields clarity against the perversion of reason*” though Jaspers totally gives importance in the same the role of theologians and their theologies to the future and destiny of humanity.

Second, Jaspers does not discredit the danger of philosophy by saying,

In our present reality, the academic philosophy that boasts of its scientific character is helpless. What we need is not mere specialized knowledge, as in all the sciences, but a change in man, the kind he has become conscious of since Socrates and Plato.⁵⁴

Even though this is philosophical, the same with Kant’s view, it has a revelatory undertone. Therefore, this implies theological anthropology related to the question of human reason and freedom. For theology does not teach us to absolutely trust human reasoning as a ground for freedom but in the wisdom, knowledge, reason, and truth of God alone.

The third description of Jaspers on the nature and function of reason implies looking at reality as an integral whole. One area of knowledge considers the other in making judgment on any aspect of life.

Departmental thinking leads us to view our own limited activity as absolute, to carry it out regardless of the whole – until, despite formal mutual acknowledgement of the departments, it grows like a tumor in the living body, harmful to the spirit of the whole...Reason is capable of listening to existence; it manifests itself when it becomes one with the reality of our being...Both practical insight and transcendent thinking lie within the scope of reason. To turn back from the accustomed, self-sufficient intellectual way of thinking to the way of reason – that is the change in man on which his future depends.”⁵⁵

And fourth,

Reason demands that the spirit be freed so that we may become truly human.⁵⁶

The term spirit in this sense somewhat sounds synonymous with G.C. Berkouwer’s emphasis on internal freedom as a basic prerequisite to the freedom of the whole being of humanity.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 210, 213, 217.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 230.

Furthermore, we must know the classifications of reason so that we will be more guided whether our lines of thought corresponding to action are in harmony with genuine human freedom that is patterned on God's humanity in Christ.⁵⁸ Macquarrie divides reason into two categories. The first is speculative reason that "*endeavors to construct a metaphysics or theory of reality.*"⁵⁹ The second is critical reason that is divided into two. The one pertains to elucidatory and corrective exercises of reason that

Sifts, analyzes, expounds and, generally speaking, brings into the light the content of revelation. This use of reason would not be an autonomous exercise, but would always be subject to the revelation itself and perhaps even to divine illumination, so that reason here is ancillary to revelation.⁶⁰

The other is corrective reason that

is directed upon the revelation or alleged revelation itself, questioning its credentials, submitting it to scrutiny and criticism, removing from its content whatever may be involved in irreconcilable conflict with other well-founded convictions that may be held.⁶¹

Emil Brunner also writes on his comment on reason which makes theology scientific,

[Being scientific (theology)] means to place the reason at the service of the Word of God...By means of the Christian revelation we perceive the truth of reason, and rational knowledge, to be a ray of the eternal Wisdom of God; but this rational knowledge itself does not give us any access to that Wisdom of God; it is merely a pointer to it, as it is a reflection from it.⁶²

In relation to freedom as a component of reason, Brunner writes,

Genuine freedom is not that freedom of choice conceived in rationalistic manner, but willing obedience to the God who calls us to communion with Himself.⁶³

⁵⁷ Berkouwer, *Man in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 311-312.

⁵⁸ For further explanations and information about theology-philosophy or theology-reason relationship, see my articles "*The Interwoven Relationship of Religion, Theology, and Ethics with Secular Knowledge,*" outlines III. A and the ff., IV. A and "*The Social Theology of Paul Tillich,*" outline III, 33rd Stanza.

⁵⁹ Macquarrie, 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason: A Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), 311, 321.

⁶³ Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: R.T.S., Lutterworth Press, 1939), 265-266.

Tillich comments on the relationship between reason and the final revelation (Jesus Christ),

Final revelation does not destroy reason; it fulfills reason. It liberates reason from the conflict between heteronomy and autonomy by giving the basis for a new theonomy.⁶⁴

Theologically, Christ is the authentic paradigm of a reasonable person. He has no inner contradiction and is in harmony with heaven and with the central purpose, meaning, and aim of creation, i.e., the self-actualization and the worship of God (e.g., Ecclesiastes 12:13b).

Christ perfectly exemplifies the person of freedom. He freely decides for His destiny from the bottom of his heart in doing his duty to God and fellow humans. He exercises independence of thought. At the same time, he affirms interdependence with his followers in decision and action (e.g., John 15:1-17). He exercises theonomy because his decisions and actions accord with divine intention for humanity and the world despite his contradiction with the people assimilated to the pressure of the corrupted, broken, and alienated world.

XI. The Human Dimension of Theology

Although theology is of God, i.e., it lets the Holy Spirit absorb and possess us in theologizing, it is basically human undertaking for the following reasons. First, it is basically human understanding. It is a product of human thought penetrated by faith. Besides, it follows the way the human intellect operates through being rational and observant of the principle of logic. It is a product of human experience with God. A saying goes on, "*Theology is autobiography.*" Theology is mediated by culture, which is a product of human creativity, in conveying its basic contents.

Second, theology is a product of faith inherent in the human being. Faith is supervised by the supernatural gift, e.g., through the gracious act of the Holy Spirit. It expresses itself through

⁶⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, 150.

the following: forms of speech (e.g., preaching), public conduct (ethics), and liturgical celebrations.

XII. Challenges to Theology

Every human endeavor attempts to overcome contradictions in life. Theology is a human endeavor. Therefore, the same with other disciplines, it addresses unresolved questions in life. Its address to the perennial predicament, such as the human destiny, implies the search of its own relevance. In order to be incessantly relevant, it must consider some challenges to its role in history. Its first challenge is its faithfulness to the Gospel, i.e., it must continue to be informed by the more dynamic Biblical scholarship. Though it perceives the Bible as an authoritative basis in understanding God, it must open itself for continuous refinement in its understanding of the Bible itself. This constantly treats the Bible as sacred, aside from being authoritative.

Related with the faithfulness to the Gospel, theology must dialogue with classics of faith, especially the articulation of the essence of Christianity by the Church Fathers, Reformers, etc. In the reformed evangelical context, it must refine, redefine, and reinterpret the basic Protestant principle such as the Sovereignty of God, the Primacy of the Scriptures, Justification by Grace through Faith, etc.

Second, theology is challenged in its rationality. It must prove itself that is a rational discourse similar to other disciplines. Its content is the *Logos*, i.e., both Word and Reason. Within the context of reason, theology stresses that God allows Himself to be involved in the rational discourse. Reason is the gift of God to humanity. Therefore, the human mind must conform to the Divine Reason that implies the need for revelations. Traditionally, Western Christianity's theology attempts to penetrate the Divine Mind. This is manifested in its overconfidence with philosophy. The theology of Eastern Christianity acknowledges the mystery of the Divine that results in its being contemplative and mystical. Theoretically, the evangelical Protestant Christianity affirms that God remains unknown – the “*Wholly Other*” – while it participates in the Divine Reason. This prevents the theological reflector of committing the sin of the pride of knowledge that results in transforming theology into either a superstitious or objectivist ideology.

Theology must also consider the empirical science's test to rationality. The first is objectivity, i.e., a theological statement is true if it corresponds to the objective reality. In this sense, theology must be keen on moral responses to the question what must be the fundamental reality. Protestantism is traditionally in line with nominalist philosophical framework that asserts that the real is the particular, actual, individual, and the concrete. It contrasts the version of realism that asserts that the real is the universal essence. Idealism and realism interchanged in some periods of history in interpreting reality. The idealism before the Reformation became the realism in the Reformation period. The original description of realism before the Reformation became the nominalism in the Reformation. The nominalism asserted by Luther parallels with the pre-Reformation version of realism that also parallels with the empirical, pragmatic, and existentialist view of reality. In the Reformation the version of realism asserted by Roman Catholicism parallels with idealism in the pre-Reformation era and it parallels with the essential view of reality. One is outside of reality or "unrealistic" if his/her ideas deviate from normative and prevailing ideas. This is presumably tantamount to deviating from truth. Traditionally, its practical consequence is excommunicating people bearing deviant ideas paralleling with obvious or subtle discrimination of individuals or groups and political, religious, cultural, and racial bigotry in our own modern and post-modern era.

Theoretically, the nominalist philosophical framework of Protestantism is more prolific in generating contextual theologies. It is more open to relative ideas and social plurality. Practically, however, many Protestants subtly or obviously discriminate or subjugate the people, even their own fellow Protestants and church members, due to differences of political beliefs and opinions.

Theoretically, the version of realism of RCC in the Reformation says to a person, "*You are who you are because of your ideas.*" Whereas, the nominalist Protestant says to a person, "*You are who you are because of your actual attitude, habit, behavior and lifestyle.*" The nominalist Protestant implies that having bright ideas or sound ideologies do not necessarily reflect an exemplary lifestyle. Even the exemplary action of a person is still tainted with sin.

Kant's view of reality is also helpful in detecting human pretension. Kant categorizes reality into phenomena and noumena. Phenomena pertain to "*things as they appear.*" Noumena

pertain to “*things as they exist.*” Here, existence sharply distinguishes from appearance. Existing realities do not always mean they appear though they are real. Appearances of realities imply that there are deeper realities that really exist behind their appearances. To detect whether any religious organization is being infiltrated or controlled or deeply influenced by any outside political movement with corresponding ideology is to discern its pronouncement and engagement. If the pronouncement and engagement of the leadership of any religious institution is obviously bias and favorable to one political movement despite its claim or pride of preferential option for the poor, deprived, and oppressed, this implies that the same institution allows herself to be used and opened to exploitation and infiltration by a particular political and ideological faction. In this sense, the religious institution appears like a tree tied up and choked by a Banyan tree. When the Banyan tree grows enormously on its tied up and choked tree, the former symbolizing a political and ideological movement can hardly be distinguished anymore from the latter symbolizing the religious institution until the latter itself totally diminishes with its power of being. In this sense, religion seems to appear as a political movement because the former speaks the language of the latter prejudicial and discriminatory against other groups within and outside religious institutions. This can be detected through the election and domination of leadership in the pluralist institution by people with the same line of thought. On the other hand, the political movement seems to appear as religious because it is clothed or wrapped up by religious symbols.

Kant’s categorization of reality into phenomena and noumena is a helpful tool to analyze and come up a conclusion on different realities such as social problems to be addressed by theology, philosophy, and ethics, especially poverty. While we always attribute our poverty in the Philippines to macro-economic system and political economy, we must also ask whether the same social problem has something to do with our beliefs which have social consequences. Poverty as a social consequence belongs to phenomena. Beliefs may fall under noumena. Traditionally, poverty and outer-worldly asceticism are virtuous for Roman Catholicism while industry, frugality, and inner-worldly asceticism are traditional virtues of Calvinist Protestantism. Therefore, the two groups of virtue, which reflect their beliefs belonging to noumena, obviously differ their phenomenal social consequences. In this sense, there is a partial

truth in the statement that poverty is only the appearance (phenomena) of the real existing (noumena) problem which is no other than beliefs (noumena). Besides, popular social issues do not always necessarily reflect real issues in life. Logical reasoning does not always imply sound psychology. That's why psychology always warns us to be cautious of defense mechanisms which sound logical but not real.

In a personal-psychological level, the phenomena-noumena relationship implies that one's verbal intention does not always necessarily reflect one's inner intention or desire. One may speak logically and gently, but he/she might just appear phony.

Second, theological statements should correspond with the historic heritage of the community of faith engaging in theology. For example, how to prove the historicity of Jesus with the fact that he did not leave any artifact directly related to him? For Rodulf Bultmann, Jesus Christ who is the object of faith is historically real through the kerygma of the primitive church.

The third is the coherence of theology. Theology must be free from inner contradictions. It must be governed by the inner logic or it must be consistent. However, the Christian faith is also composed of paradoxical truths. For example, the Eternal One who is with us becomes like us via His incarnation in Christ. And the fourth is the testability of theological statement that judges the nature of a certain mundane entity. For instance, the depravity of humanity is no longer theologically debatable as a given historical reality.

And the third challenge to theology is contextuality. This means theology must respond to the question of the time. Every era of history has its own sets of question arising from human experiences.

XIII. Theological Methods

Migliore's discernment identifies three enlightening theological methods in the modern period.⁶⁵ The first is the Christocentric theology (or theology of the Word of God) popularized by Barth. Jesus Christ who is the Final Revelation and who is God Himself is the point of departure of theology. The Christocentric theology seems to presume that Christ is the final

⁶⁵ Migliore, pp. 14-18.

answer to human miseries without asking the real state of humanity which should be addressed by theology. Based on the concrete reality, Christ is not the answer to the human quest for a heroic liberation of societies due to the human confusion who must be revered as authority figures in any society. Practically, however, Christ is really the answer to human miseries because He is the perfect human and divine figure whom human beings must seek their liberation. The authentic liberation starts from the question what it means to become truly human. Christ perfectly exemplifies the real essence and existence of humanity that should be foundational for human existence.

The second is the theology of correlation popularized by Tillich. This pertains to the question from “below” or humanity’s existential state as the point of departure of theology. This analyzes and penetrates first the depth of both objective and subjective sides of the human situation before the revelatory answer from above is proclaimed to the same human state. It harmonizes the relationship of theology (Divine wisdom/Knowledge) with philosophy and social sciences (human knowledge) in the quest for truth. This does not legitimize, but it checks and evaluates any human philosophies. Philosophy and theology must not assimilate each other. Thus, Tillich writes,

The method of correlation explains the content of the Christian faith through existential question and theological answers in mutual interdependence.⁶⁶

And the third theological method is the liberation praxis of Gutierrez. Praxis pertains to the cycle of action and reflection until faith becomes perfect in the long process. The believer’s action, such as social involvement, realizes and produces new insights in reflection. Reflections rectify and improve the action based on new revelatory insights which are grounded on the Bible and social teachings of the institutional church.

⁶⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 60.

XIV. Conclusion

Christianity came into being with a noble purpose, i.e., to mend humanity's fragmented being caused by the broken relationship between humanity and God, between or among human beings, between the human being and himself/herself, and the human being and nature.

One of the important tools to overcome humanity's estrangement from God is educating humanity itself with knowledge. This elevates the consciousness of humanity on its predicament such as the question what does it mean to become a truly human being. The disciplines that partially provide answers to this vicissitude are theology, philosophy, and ethics which start from faith in God and culminate in character and service to the Divine and humanity.

The culmination of the faith in human character and service marks the liberation of the human being. But the attainment of human liberation undergoes different stages aside from making the human being conscious of himself/herself. The sense of reality from psychological and philosophical perspectives guides and adds to the human being's consciousness.

To be more conscious, the human being must have the basic knowledge of the nature of different realities. The example is to look at things in proper perspective and context. Theology, philosophy, and ethics help in defining the nature of realities especially the human being. However, the *Shema* needs to be cultured in order to sustain itself. One way to cultivate it is the putting up and strengthening of learning institutions, e.g., the sectarian SCC, BC, SU, Philippine Christian University (PCU), Central Philippine University (CPU), etc.

The Johannine author writes,

Now, there are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world could not hold the books that would be written. (John 21: 25, Good News, TEV)

Aside from the premise that there were genuine New Testament writings that were not discovered, preserved and included in the canonization of the Bible, aside from the reality that there was actually no formal closure of the canonization of the New Testament in the ecumenical Christian church in general, our theological undertaking must continue to be opened for broader possibilities. Theology has points of departure but it has no points of ending. But as a basically human undertaking, the theological reflector and articulator must acknowledge the fact that the

Final Word does not belong to human beings, especially the brilliant theologians. The Final Word only belongs to God, the Beginning from which we came and the End to which we go.

The Russian Orthodox Bishop said to the participants of the Orthodox Theology Seminar I attended in St. Petersburg, Russia:

You are all theologians. But in facing at the Cross of Christ no one becomes a theologian. When Christ was hanged on the Cross his disciples were just silent and absent. Some of them were just looking at him on Calvary from a very far distance – marveling and crying.

While we affirm that the *Shema* is the core of the Judeo-Christian faith and theology, the Cross of Christ serves as the “*criterion of doing theology...In Christianity the cross is the test of everyone which deserves to be called Christian.*”⁶⁷ Luther prefers and suffers with excommunication with his “*Theology of the Cross*” – his turning point of theology – rather than the “*theology of glory*” of the late Medieval Christendom.⁶⁸ Aside from emphasizing the hiddenness of God, the Cross measures how sincere our faith and theology in uttering the contents of the *Shema*, i.e.,

...Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and will your strength...Love your neighbor as you love yourself. (Mark 12:29-31, TEV)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (I Corinthians 13:1-2, RSV)

⁶⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harpers and Row Publishers, 1974), 7, 32-75.

⁶⁸ Justo Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought: From Protestant Reformation to the 20th Century*, Vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press/Pantheon Press, 1975), 35-41.

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† This article has been authored by **SOLOMON CASTILLANO RIVAS** who is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). The author is a Faculty of the College of Theology and Religious Studies Department since 1998 in Southern Christian College (SCC), Midsayap, Cotabato, Philippines. He earned his Bachelor of Theology from SCC (1990), Master of Divinity from Silliman University Divinity School, Dumaguete City, Philippines (1998), and Master of Sacred Theology specializing in Social Theology from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A (2003). He has taught the ff. courses from 1998 to the present: Systematic Theology, Philosophy of Religion, Social Philosophy, Ethics, Comparative Religion, Church History and Doctrine, Biblical Studies, etc. He is married to former Miss Judelyn Bade Ferolin, a public school teacher and a very active UCCP lay member, and blessed with two children, Kathleen Alixa and Cyrus Adam.