

Critical Theology

engaging
church
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society

Fall 2019 issue edited by Rosemary P. Carbine

Introduction

This issue features Asian North American liberation theologies about wide-ranging prominent topics in critical and prophetic theologies that encompass Asian North American contexts and experiences—grace and global Catholicity in light of early and medieval Christianities, biblical liberationist hermeneutics found in a recent handbook reviewed by Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, and in Pauline studies, particularly in light of the perspectives of migrant workers, and feminist theo-ethical reflections on modern-day slavery. Thus, this issue follows the nudge of the Spirit, as Don Schweitzer characterizes a recent book in pneumatology, because these essays collectively emphasize the emerging realities of the people of God in the contemporary Church and the need for new constructive theological, biblical, and ethical praxis.

Sophia Park's essay highlights the writings of medieval German mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg on grace as flow which challenges, upends, and reconstructs given social orders as a way to reinterpret the practice of global Catholicity. Finding and having a voice, border crossing, and transforming the world not only characterize contemporary contextual, liberationist, and postcolonial theologies, but also are exemplified, as Park shows, in the early Church. Julius-Kei Kato's essay constructs an Asian North American biblical liberationist hermeneutics that correlates biblical texts about the figure of Paul with concrete Asian North American contexts—in this case, international Filipina migrant workers and their experiences of some measure of liberation for themselves and other similarly disadvantaged fellow migrants. Rachel Bundang's essay critically combines Catholic social teaching, feminist ethics, and ethnic studies to explore the com-

plex intersections of gendered, economic, physical, and emotional violence in the lives of Filipina-American domestic workers.

Taken together, these essays parallel themes from "Reforming Tradition: A Conversation with Bishop Remi De Roo," which was hosted by Paul Bramadat, Director of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, and moderated by Ian Alexander, lay canon of the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia, a parishioner at Christ Church Cathedral, and a lifetime senior fellow of Massey College at the University of Toronto. Remi De Roo holds a doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas Angelicum in Rome. He is one of Canada's longest-

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servicing Catholic bishops, a participant in all four sessions of Vatican II, a scholar, author, and advocate, especially but not only in his role as the first chair of the British Columbia Human Rights Commission and as chair of the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Relevant excerpts from this conversation emphasize De Roo as an exemplar of doing critical prophetic theology in diverse contexts.

IA: Do you see a distinction, or even a tension—if not conflict—between the Church as the people of God ... and the Church as institution?

RDR: Yes, certainly. There has been, and there always will be, tensions. And that's the old issue which we discussed briefly before coming here: between the institutional incarnate dimension and the Spirit—you might say, the prophetic—dimension. There are those in the Church who, by calling, specifically are meant to be prophets; I mentioned particularly the religious orders. And I want to say it now, because I might forget, in terms of my personal experience right here on Vancouver Island as a council father, no one has made visible and incarnate the spirit of Vatican II better than the religious communities, specifically the religious communities of women. They have been, and continue to be, a prophetic voice, which we have to recognize, and of which I am very proud, because I'm very proud to be associated with them in this work.

IA: When we speak of prophetic Catholicism, we come to think very quickly about issues of social justice.... What do you say to people ... who still say the Church has no business meddling in politics?

RDR: Very good question. My first answer would be "Have you read your Bible?" Then I'd probably go by speaking a little bit more ... about the nature of politics: What is politics? It's not just what we see around us.... There's a Greek word behind that: *polis* means "the city," the community, the extended family. So all of us, particularly since Vatican II, must be aware that, since we were created equal in dignity and in capacity to serve (and have our sacrament of baptism to back that up—and we can come back to that), we're all called to be concerned for, and involved in, the pursuit of justice.... Because the whole scriptures are about the order God put into the universe and how we human beings are to be administrators of that order and respect it.... We are responsible for mother nature, on whom we depend from the first moment of our existence.... So, political engagement is part of bringing about good order in society. In our prayers each day

we say, "Our Father ... thy will be done, thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven." Think about that; it's very serious. Heaven is not something that's going to happen in the by-and-by; heaven is not something pie in the sky; heaven is the beginning, for each one of us individually and collectively, of our relationship with the divine purpose which put us here in the first place. So, really, we enter into that concept of being just and of worshipping God from the moment that we become conscious of who we are.... But we are all called to do the best we can to see to it that every human being can live a decent and comfortable life, and do meaningful work, and go about talking with others and together trying to build the best example that we can have here on earth of what, ultimately, heaven will be.

IA: You served for a long time as the chair of the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian bishops, and I think it was New Year's Day 1983 when that group published "Reflections on the Crisis in the Canadian Economy".... Here we are 35 years later, and there is greater economic disparity now perhaps than there has ever been before, even more so than then. There is housing shortage and unaffordability, there is food insecurity, there are more children in this province living below the poverty line than ever. So, once again I have to ask this question: All of this action, all of this talk—has anything changed?

RDR: From the outside, if you only go by newspaper headlines, I would say no, nothing has changed. But, on the basis of my own experience as a bishop here on Vancouver Island, I would say that we witness already, particularly since Vatican II, a rising tide of people of goodwill who have taken the message of Vatican II seriously, particularly the document on the Church in the Modern World, and are becoming more conscious, more vocal, and more empowered to do something about transforming society. So I remain optimistic, while recognizing that terrible things are happening.... We're all responsible—it's not just a few elected leaders. And the first responsibility, of course, is to see to it that the people we elect as leaders are the ones who are most able and willing to lead us along the paths of justice.... And we should have more of those prophetic voices—and prophetic actions—from all the citizens. That's part of the whole thing of being equal in dignity and in capacity to serve, and thereby equally responsible—not all in the same task; there's a variety of responsibilities. But, there again, we're back to the point: Who do we elect to lead us in this doing of justice?

Grace as Flowing Light in Global Catholicity

By Sophia Park, SNJM

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Today, we face the issue of “encounters” as a consequence of large-scale globalization, which manifest as free capitalist markets that maximize capital per se. Migration for the cheaper labour market, exile, or refugees from violence such as war or genocide, or dislocation from natural disasters happen more frequently. A list of such conditions would evoke large-scale encounters between cultures, religions, races, genders, places, and – most importantly – all the “in-betweenness,” which highlights an uncertainty, ambiguity, and possibly alternative development. In one estimate of global population demographics, 18 million persons are currently refugee populations, 24 million persons are refugees or dislocated within their own country, and 40 million are transitory, not named as refugees, yet crossing borders.¹

In our interrelated world, various interactions occur unexpectedly, and relationships with others become more complicated and difficult to define or predict. As a consequence, these encounters often bring a high level of perplexity, discomfort, and even anxiety. For instance, according to the 2015 statistics on the population of California, 60.3 percent of the population is from a so-called racial and ethnic minority group. As such, this reality dissolves the dictionary definition of the minority as the smaller in the number of any two groups constituting a whole.² Global realities create difficulties in defining an ethnic minority, while people are on the move beyond national borders.

This phenomenon will increase and become more prevalent on the global scale. Congruently, the majority of Roman Catholics will soon no longer be Euro-American but Asian, African, and Latin American. Non-European American Catholics are growing and thriving in their respective cultural terrains around the country, just as the early Church thrived in the Mediterranean, coming out of Jewish territory. In the 21st-century Catholic Church, we find multiple plotlines that reflect human stories: an encounter between intense religious devotions and a post/modern consciousness, the waning of the cultural relevance of the institutional Church, and realities associated with increasing religious pluralism as well as critical awareness of “the other.”³ Thus, one of the most crucial theological inquiries in our time is how we should live our faith and what kind of attitude is required to practise global Catholicity.

Theology, in general, has tended to claim the universal truth, which is pervasive in Western culture reinforcing “others”—namely, non-European Catholics, whose faith has developed on their distinct cultural soil and philosophical tradition—to follow the truth. We are keenly aware of the postcolonial discourse in which third world theologians have struggled to gain their authentic voices in the midst of Western theological dominance. Contextual theology, involving Asian/American, *mestizaje*, and Black theologies, emphasizes difference and distinctiveness, as well as analyzes power dynamics existing within the Church and its theological discourse. In this discourse, the importance of difference, not repetition, suggests no representative faith, but the immediate and creative interpretation and articulation of that faith.⁴ No doubt, feminist awareness in general and third-wave feminist thought in particular has spurred this movement.

In the context of global Catholicity, this essay will explore the meaning of grace by emphasizing the character of flow, which challenges and subverts given social orders, and by employing the vision of Mechthild of Magdeburg, a 13th-century German woman mystic. Also, this essay reads the Acts of Apostles to showcase grace as flow, which indicates having voices, crossing borders, and as a consequence transforming the world.

Mechthild of Magdeburg: Flow of Light from Godhead

Following the generally given definition of grace that underlines the aspect of certain favouritism given by God, we assume there is a sense of election. This definition raises a question in the global context about who is the favourite of the Divine’s mercy. Is divine favouritism given to a particular people? Then who is not involved in this elect status? To consider who is and who is not in the enterprise of grace, a fascinating character is Mechthild of Magdeburg, who understood grace as flowing, using the medieval German word *fließen*, light from the Godhead. Her understanding of grace presupposes unlimited favour flowing from the Trinitarian God or the in-between space of the three persons in one God. She also emphasizes an intimate and mutual relationship between the soul and God, and consequently between human beings. This view could be extended to global Catholicity, challenging

and reconstructing a vision for an alternative Church in the world. Mechthild seems to share the ideas of grace with Meister Eckhart, her contemporary German mystic, who comprehended grace as movement between “the flowing-forth (*exitus-esmanatio*) of all things from the hidden ground of God and the “flowing-back” or “breaking through” of the universe into Godhead.⁵ Mechthild, however, further elaborated the nature of grace as flowing, employing metaphors such as water, honey, tears, wine, milk, and blood, which are profoundly feminine images and used in a more intimate way.

Her writing *Flow of Light from Godhead* is composed of seven books; each intensively describes her relationship with God and her contemporaries.⁶ Her writing style reveals the nature of grace as flow which is free-flowing, eclectic, and fragmented. In general, scholars situate her writing within the nuptial mystical literature of Christianity as well as the courtly love literature written in the vernacular language, along with other medieval women mystics.⁷

Nuptial Mystical Christian Writing

Ways of describing relationships with God vary. One among them is nuptial, rooted in biblical texts as well as in mystical literature. In the Bible, we observe that the nuptial union was employed as allegory or metaphor and applied to understand the relationship between a soul and God, or Israel as a whole people and God.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Prophets in general, and Hosea and Ezekiel in particular, used the marital relationship allegorically as a way to explain the covenantal relationship between Israel and Yahweh. In this allegory, an angry and jealous husband represents God, while an unfaithful and promiscuous wife characterizes Israel. The depiction of unfaithful Israel sounds horribly harsh, calling the wife a whore.⁸ Moreover, the level of anger and hostility that narrative carries is scandalous. Many scholars argued that these passages could lead to a misreading, so that this figurative expression might have influenced the negative perception of women or at least might have been used to justify any mistreatment of women.⁹ In other words, in the prophetic writings, the sexual union as a metaphor describes women or women’s position negatively, and in a way, reinforces the misogynic norms of patriarchal culture.

The other example of nuptial literature in the Bible is The Song of Songs. It describes intimacy with God, manifested in the beauty of the union between a soul and God, and in this case, the woman is not a merely passive receiver of divine favours. The Song of Songs begins with the woman’s bold speech:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
for your love is more delightful than wine.
Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.
No wonder the young women love you!
Take me away with you—let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers. (1:1-4)

The woman in chapter 3 is fearlessly wandering at night, seeking her lost lover until she finds and reconnects with him.

In The Song of Songs, readers find a mutual relationship and both parties’ mutual yearning for union. Scholars argue that this book is very similar to the wedding song of ancient Egypt, and due to highly carnal expressions, The Song of Songs caused controversy until it was included in the final lists of the biblical canon.¹⁰ Nevertheless, this biblical text has been the foundation of mystical nuptial writing, through reiteration, rephrasing, and reimagination. Perhaps Mechthild’s writing could be counted as a commentary on the Song of Songs.

In the mystical tradition of Christianity, male mystics such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. John of the Cross ardently expressed their desire for union with God as a bride. In this case, the male mystic writer who expresses the union with God as a sexual union becomes the bride, while God is the bridegroom. Although not explicitly defining himself as the bride, Bernard of Clairvaux mentions in the seventy-third sermon on The Song of Songs that “a single soul, if she loves God, clearly, wisely, and ardently, is a Bride.”¹¹ In this commentary, Bernard believes that the love of the bride for God is pure and prudent as well as intelligent and passionate.¹² Although he calls the soul who loves God the woman, he indicates that the human soul is imperfect and carnal.

For the male mystics, in the reversed gender role of being the bride, the loving relationship between the male mystic and God seems highly metaphorical, assuming a heterosexual relationship. Also, because of the reversal, the intimate expression of union is preoccupied with the spiritual nature of the union, not a sexual union. On the contrary, Mechthild describes her spiritual experience as a sexual union per se, with vivid explanations of intimacy with God because Mechthild as a female represents a bride, emphasizing the likeness to a sexual union. There is no distinct boundary between spiritual and bodily experience for Mechthild, and perhaps for this reason her writing looks scandalous. Thus, her writing is congruent with much of The Song of Songs, stressing mutual yearning for union and describing the nature of inter-corporeality in raw and immediate terms, negating representation.

Courtly Love Literature

Like many medieval mystic women, Mechthild used the style of courtly love literature prevalent in then contemporary Europe. It is, then, necessary first of all to examine the literature of courtly love: how this literary manifests the nature of grace as flow to reverse the social norm. Courtly love, as a literary genre, involves intense emotions, especially a seeker's desire for union with the beloved and a willingness to sacrifice everything for the beloved. One of the compelling elements of her writing is the way she describes the intimate relationship between the soul and the acting or moving Trinity.

In her writing, she describes the Trinity as the flow of God's grace which guides her and the universe as well to reveal God's sheer superabundance itself.¹³ With this understanding of God's grace, Mechthild's claim of Divine Love is so bold that she dares to challenge the clerics of the cathedrals of Magdeburg with authority and clarity. In her vision, the restricted hierarchical church structure would not align with the Trinity, which is an active agent, always moving, freeing, and transforming. In that sense, her writing by nature is political, challenging or reversing the Church Curia that provided neither space nor voice for women or any minor subjects.

Also, Mechthild's writing reverses or at least rejects conformity to the gender roles of her society. She writes about the intimacy with God as a sexual union in a courtly manner; this expression invites us to think of gender roles as not fixed within biological sex, and in so doing reverses the gender norms of her and our society.

Mechthild situates herself as an active agent to seek love; usually, this is the role of the knight rather than the passive one who waits to be loved, the courtly woman. In this love relationship, the woman is the object of desire with her high social status who takes a passive role in this relationship. Often, the political dimensions of courtly love are overlooked, emphasizing the personal relationship between two lovers. However, there is a power differential in courtly love between the knight, a young man of lower rank, and his lover, the high-ranking court woman. A young knight gains access to climb the social ladder through this relationship. Mechthild, likewise, gains power through this relationship, but reverses gender roles. Through this relationship, she becomes an active agent in seeking love, consequently gaining voice and authority. In so doing, she achieves the freedom to love beyond gender, beyond social constructs.

Mechthild identifies herself with the bride of the Trinity. According to book IV, 12, the bride says: "My love has slipped away from me while I slept, resting in union

with Him."¹⁴ During the medieval period, many women wrote about their theology, uniquely employing descriptions of their living environments as the locus of God's revelation, mostly their domestic spaces such as a bedroom or chamber.

It is remarkable that women authors wrote in vernacular languages to raise their voices as acting agents, which was otherwise impossible. Interestingly, in late medieval Korea, male philosophers wrote their disquisitions in Chinese, while the women wrote in native Korean, expressing their emotions and thoughts within a highly patriarchal society.¹⁵ Vernacular literature gave women access to their voices and to alternative ways to describe their life experiences. So it is noteworthy that Mechthild wrote her book in her native language like many other women mystics during the medieval period, such as Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich, and Hadewijch of Antwerp. Unlike Latin, which is the official language of elite male clerics, Mechthild escaped the given structure of the language, thereby evading its all-controlling structure of social norms.

Her Writing and Life as Flow

Mechthild's literary style is free flowing, recapitulating the characteristics of *fließen*. Her eclectic writing style, with its repetitions and parallelism, as well as a sense of spontaneity, reveals her central concern with divine grace as crossing boundaries.¹⁶ In her unique and vivid writing, she rejects a uniform, linear style and instead writes in a way that is fragmentary, repetitive, and contradictory. Her book consists of love poems, critics of her society and the Church, descriptions of the vision, and commentaries. As such, she created a new meaning, and both her voice and God's voice become the co-authors of a love song. Elizabeth Anderson, in *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg*, analyzes *Flow of Light from Godhead* as a dialogue in which God and Mechthild converse in mutual experience and union.¹⁷ Mechthild further addresses the core values of this mutual intimacy through the dialogue of two: God and herself. She writes:

When you cry for me
Then I take you in my arms
But when you love, then we two become one,
And when we two are one,
Then there can never be a parting,
But rather there is a delightful expectation
Between the pair of us.¹⁸

For Mechthild, one does not lose a sense of one's soul within this perfect intimacy. There is a strong desire to be united with God, but at the same time, there is a clear distinction between the Godhead and the soul.¹⁹ Her unique voice claims that mutuality exists in this intersubjective relationship: neither losing one's own identity nor being self-absorbed in the union.

Mechthild's life is not well known except through her writings, which record her experience of God, not a thesis about God. Most scholars agree that she was a member of the Beguines who had, at an unusually young age, moved to Magdeburg to join a Beguine community. Her pre-existing relationship with God must have given her a strong sense of independence, and her characteristics and spirituality must have shaped other women's souls.

Notably, she influenced other women to write about their own lives as a form of autobiography. In the Benedictine monastery of Helfta, where Mechthild stayed at the last stage of her life, women at the monastery such as St. Gertrude the Great and St. Mechthild of Hackborn wrote about their spiritual lives. Mechthild as a writer with an authentic voice would have encouraged other women to find their voices through writing. This demonstrates how her understanding of God as flow transformed her into an agent to help other women to gain their voices.

Mechthild's writing on grace as flow illuminates God's loving nature, which is inter-corporeal, intersubjective, and interrelational. Within this mutual loving relationship, grace as flow invites people to cross all boundaries of social norms, gender, culture, and so on. Through her experience of God's grace in her writing, she gains a voice in that she empowers other women as well as challenges the Church Curia through crossing all kinds of borders. According to Mechthild, grace as flow (1) gives authentic voice, (2) crosses boundaries of social norms, including gender roles, and (3) transforms herself as well as other women. These three elements will be examined through a close reading of the Acts of Apostles.

The Acts of the Apostles: A Model of Grace as Flow

Employing and expanding on Mechthild's idea of grace as flow could be understood as gaining voice, crossing boundaries, and transformation through the Holy Spirit, which moves freely towards the uncertain and ambiguous reality, or the real. Her vision of *fließen* could expand to include the Acts of the Apostles. In today's biblical scholarship, Acts is one of the most attractive examples because it sheds lights on post-colonial concerns with empire, globalization, and capitalism. The text of Acts describes how the early Christian community moves and grows. In the first century, the burgeoning Christian community, full of grace, no longer had Jesus as the teacher and faced a new reality that lives with Christ in the Holy Spirit, challenging them into a discernment process. Also, in the conflicted world of the first century, the Christian movement would have been the source of controversy and uncertainty.²⁰ The early Church needed to discern

concerns both internal and external, although these two often intersect. As such, the early Church community had to remain in grace as flowing as well as be ready to accept the unexpected.

The Acts of the Apostles is a biblical text that witnesses the Jesus movement filled with grace, which emphasizes the movement of challenging cultural norms as well as creating an alternative world through boundary crossings. Then empire, and now globalization, exerts power through cultural and intellectual networks that operate in more hidden ways.²¹ The early Christian community in Acts resisted and sometimes cooperated with the Roman empire, and in so doing created an alternative way of living.

Acts 1:8 shows the whole vision of the Acts: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In my reading, this phrase indicates that the flow (*fließen*) of the Holy Spirit crosses the borders of regions. This involves the crossing of geographical, cultural, and ethnic borders. The whole narrative begins in Jerusalem and finishes in Rome, the centre of empire. Within this schema, I highlight three pivotal cases of grace as the fluidity of the Holy Spirit.

The First Scene: Gaining a Voice

The first scene is the flow of fire or tongues from the Godhead that outpoured upon the heads of the people who prayed in Jerusalem in chapter 2. It was during Pentecost, so many diaspora Jews had come to Jerusalem. These people received a flowing of tongues and began to speak in other languages. More specifically, the narrative of Acts explains that due to the Holy Spirit, each person present understood what they heard in their own tongue. Justo Gonzalez, in his commentary of Acts, insightfully explains the passage as follows.

The Holy Spirit had two options: one was to make all understand the Aramaic the disciples spoke; the other was to make each understand in their tongue. Significantly, the Spirit chooses the latter route.... Had the Spirit made all the listeners understand the language of the apostles, we would be justified in a centripetal understanding of mission, one in which all who come in are expected to be like those who invited them.²²

The Holy Spirit allowed people to understand the Gospel or the Jesus movement through their vernacular languages and cultures. Often language functions as a tool to centralize power and to regulate people's way of thinking. As observed in the writing of Mechthild, her native language leveraged her expression of her relationship with God more freely. In the early Church, people from all over the world spoke their language

freely, and all understood in their language openly. It is the birthmark of the Christian community, and it is the grace that the Holy Spirit flows into human hearts so they understood or listened to other languages entirely—and in so doing, many believers gained their authentic voices.

The Second Scene: Crossing Borders

The second scene of grace as flow is located in Acts:10-11, in which Peter and Cornelius, an Italian centurion, encounter each other, and as a consequence Christians in Jerusalem accept that the Gospel is accessible also to the Gentiles. In this episode, there is no “other,” often referring to the position of the margin or the minor in the midst of the power of the Holy Spirit. The whole narrative is balanced so there is not a single subject that can be considered the counterpart to the other; instead, this scene shows the intersubjectivity between Peter and Cornelius in mutual respect. In this episode, the flow of the Spirit from the Godhead challenges the socio-cultural norm and invites Peter and Jesus’ followers into unfamiliarity.

In the first part of this episode, Peter saw a vision impelling him to cross the boundary of dietary code: the undoing of food restrictions would be organically related to the acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter, who received a stranger or a guest at the lodge where he stayed as a guest, under the flow of the Holy Spirit, visited Cornelius, the stranger. In this encounter, there exists a thin line between the host and the guest; more accurately, neither of them served as the host—the Holy Spirit played that role. This event signifies the boundary crossing of ethnicity, religion, and culture.

Even more surprising, in this episode Cornelius and his colleagues received the Holy Spirit in a pronounced way. Peter then suggests that they should be baptized. This part shows the reversal of the process of becoming a member of the Christian community, in which receiving the Holy Spirit usually follows baptism. In this way, the text emphasizes the freedom of the Spirit who flows from the Godhead. In this border crossing, Peter and Cornelius both had to admit the leadership of the Spirit. The second scene reveals the nature of grace of the Godhead, which reverses or subverts presumed religious and social orders, rules, and structures by including various aspects of border crossings.

The Final Scene: Jerusalem Council

The final scene lies in Acts 15, namely the Jerusalem Council. The burgeoning community created a discerning space in which they pondered what happened to the Jesus movement following the flow of the Holy Spirit. This council dealt with the problems raised by the Jewish Christians who belonged to the Pharisees and who preserved the requirement of circumcision

and other parts of the Mosaic law (15:5). There were Jewish Christians who observed Mosaic law as well as other Jewish rules. Remarkably, Acts describes dissonances in the early Christian communities in a neutral tone, implying that the quarrel or disagreement does not pose an obstacle to the grace of God, which is flowing. Instead, the obstacle is an attitude to not listen to the Holy Spirit or to one another. In this episode, Jerusalem becomes the borderland or the in-between space where all discomfort, ambiguity, and uncertainty would remain, and the community would make decisions through the Spirit-filled process of discernment.

The word “discernment” is derived from the Latin word *discernere*, meaning “separate.” In this episode, the Church community needed to separate cultural practices from Gospel values. Also, they had to measure what is a crucial or essential rule to practise not from their particular culture, but from the Gentile’s perspective. Here the basic logic employed by Peter is this: as the grace was given to us by the Holy Spirit, so to the Gentile. He emphasizes the importance of the free flowing of God’s grace in v. 11, referring to his own lived experience.

The council concluded that each local community would keep four minimal requirements, proclaiming that the Gentiles’ Christian church does not have to copy the Jewish way of life, which openly admitted diversity. The minimal four proscriptions would function to unify the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.²³ The fruit of discernment could imply that the local church would gain more autonomy guided by the Holy Spirit and its flowing grace. Moreover, this decision would usher the Christian movement into the next stage, which would flourish in the Mediterranean soil. After this event, the centre becomes the margin, and the margin becomes the centre. Alternatively, any place can be the centre and/or the margin interchangeably.

Closing Remarks

Globalization functions primarily as an economic reality and as a dominant operative system. Then how can we read and interpret the grace that flows from the Godhead in the light of globalization? The vision of Mechthild of Magdeburg encourages us to think of God’s grace as a movement that leads us to cross boundaries by subverting various norms. Also, through the movement of boundary crossings, we overcome a binary sense of the subject and the other to create a new Church, something very similar to the early Church movement.

Upon receiving grace, everyone gains transformative power and authentic voice within every culture, which erases demarcating notions of the centre and

the margin. In this new space of Christian community, the people on the margin would feel at home. Perhaps the multi-centres of the Church exist in various places, such as refugee centres, inner-city parks, or any parish hall.

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2 "Race and Ethnicity in California: Statistical Atlas," <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/California/Race-and-Ethnicity> (accessed May 12, 2018).

3 Mary Farrell Bednarowski, "Multiplicity and Ambiguity," in *Twentieth-Century Global Christianity*, ed. Mary Farrell Bendarowski (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 29.

4 See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1–27.

5 Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2001), 71. There are strong ties between Meister Eckhart and Beguine spirituality. We see the similarity between Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart. For this topic, see Danielle C. Dubois, "The Virtuous Fall: Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and the Medieval Ethics of Sin," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 43:3 (2015): 434–53.

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The Necessary Inner Liberative Dimension: An Asian North American Perspective on How Paul Might Speak to Migrant Workers' Adversities

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For some time now, I have been exploring different ways by which Asian North Americans (ANA), whom I consider in a broad sense “my community” of inclusion, could become more aware of the different oppressive structures in which they are embedded, envision another possible world, resist and experience some measure of liberation from oppression, and attain a taste of true freedom that could in turn transform the world into a place that better reflects the reign of God. I try to do this through my particular fields of scholarly interest, which are New Testament studies as well as constructive theology, and, within those disciplines, hermeneutics. I am particularly interested in ways by which ANA biblical readers-interpreters and theologians could use their very identities and experiences to read, understand, and interpret texts and their religious tradition in such a way as to reach the above-mentioned liberative goals.¹ In this study, I will look at the figure of Paul, focusing on the many adversities he faced, and examine how that could speak to the many challenges faced by Filipino migrant workers.

In my efforts to correlate the biblical text and concrete ANA contexts, liberation theology—coupled with the different nuances, insights, aids, and even correctives supplied by other cognate disciplines, particularly postcolonial critical theory—have proven invaluable.² Some necessary prolegomena about liberation theology and hermeneutical methodology will help frame the concrete contours of this essay and its aims.

Liberation Theology and the Option for the Poor and Oppressed

Liberation theology is acknowledged to have begun in Latin America in the late 1960s, when Gustavo Gutiérrez introduced the term “a theology of liberation” to characterize a new style of theologizing that emphasized, among other things, a careful analysis of local contextual realities, particularly, the dehumanizing poverty and oppression to which the masses in Latin America were (and still are) subjected, solidarity with

the poor and oppressed, critical reflection on praxis, and the principle that God has a “preferential option for the poor”—with the ultimate aim of seeking an integral liberation of the oppressed people of God.

Liberation theology understands faith as “not only truths to be affirmed,” but, most especially, “a commitment to God and human beings.”³ It has posited this faith commitment (in Spanish, *compromiso*) as the “primary” act of the theological enterprise.⁴ Only then will the “secondary” act follow: that is, the activity of reflecting about God—what used to be known as “theology” in the strict sense. Moreover, having made the commitment of faith is then followed by a need to reflect constantly on this lived commitment. That reflection on one’s lived commitment in faith is—according to liberation theology—what theology addresses.⁵

Since the 1970s, liberation theology has developed into what is undoubtedly one of the major religious phenomena in recent history, so much so that prominent theologians Harvey Cox and Peter Phan could label it the most significant theological movement of the 20th century.⁶ Myriad forms of liberationist theological style flourish today, such as North American (with its many sub-varieties: black, Hispanic, etc.), African, Asian, queer, feminist, *mujerista*/Latinx, Dalit, and so forth. Of course, Asian North American liberationist approaches proudly stand in this line.⁷ Indeed, contemporary postcolonial theology has been crucially influenced by liberation theology, although the former brings a nuanced set of emphases, characteristics, and even necessary correctives to liberationist theories and praxes.⁸

When theologians and biblical interpreters do liberation theology while keeping an open heart to see where the Divine is found, a common disclosure experience takes place. It consists in the realization and eventual conviction that God has something akin to a “preference,” decidedly directed to the oppressed. Hence, liberation theology proclaims that God actually stands

on the side of the poor and oppressed. Thus, the expression God's "preferential option for the poor" was born. If the Holy One has this priority, then this same option for the poor and oppressed should be made a priority in all theological activity. Most importantly, practitioners of liberation theology are incited to a *praxis*⁹ of liberation: that is, a deep commitment to seek and effect concrete forms of liberation for the poor and oppressed.¹⁰ Thus, Gutiérrez asserts, "to know God is to work for justice. There is no other path to reach God."¹¹

This option is not altogether unproblematic. Claiming God as a deliverer might mean at the same time that the Divine could be an oppressive conqueror for the people who, in the struggle for emancipation, are defeated, killed, or evicted (e.g., the Egyptians in the Exodus account).¹² A key task of liberation theology, then, is to envision divine action that is free from oppressing others.

Towards an Asian North American Liberationist Hermeneutics

This essay aims to explore how liberation theology applies to Asian North American theology and biblical studies.¹³ Starting in good liberationist fashion involves attending to context: What are the historical and present-day oppressive experiences that comprise the large umbrella group called Asian North Americans?¹⁴ This key question about contextual factors lifts up the veritable source or wellspring from which ANA theologians, biblical interpreters, and (especially in pastoral settings) ordinary biblical readers seeking liberation must draw to sustain their efforts to reflect and theologize in a specifically liberationist way. Moreover, a liberationist hermeneutics will intentionally focus on negative experiences as the very chains from which ANAs seek to be free. Such experiences have also been called by Gutiérrez and other thinkers "the underside of history,"¹⁵ often overlooked and ignored, especially by dominant, power-wielding groups in any given society.

To propose a possible ANA liberationist way of reading biblical and theological texts, I find that Catholic theologian David Tracy's description of steps for interpretation can be employed with much profit.¹⁶ Tracy outlines the following as steps in the hermeneutical process: First, interpreters enter the act of interpreting "bearing the history of the effects of the traditions to which they ineluctably belong." Second, interpreters confront a "classic" (see description below). Third, interpreters engage this classic text in what could be rightfully termed a hermeneutical conversation that may take myriad forms.¹⁷

Applying these steps to a possible ANA liberationist style of hermeneutics, the first step refers to ANA theologians valorizing their own ANA "personality" (whether individual or corporate) as essential to the hermeneutical process. This includes the compendium of history, country(ies) of origin, cultural traits, the mixture of cultural worlds, dominant experiences, historical injuries suffered, present realities, and so forth, that are present in the theologian's self, race, ethnicity, and community. An explicitly ANA liberationist hermeneutics will aim to highlight and analyze carefully experiences (both historical and continuing) of ANAs that could be considered oppressive and, thus, in need of an analysis and praxis geared towards liberation. Moreover, step one is also particularly valuable because, as liberation theology teaches, only by immersing oneself in a given context of oppression can certain aspects of the situation vis-à-vis the Christian tradition become clearer—aspects that would not otherwise be given more prominence.

In step two, interpreters undertake to read and interpret "texts." We can take "text" in its broadest sense: anything that has meaning and can be interpreted. The best texts to work on, Tracy suggests, though, are the "classics." We take a "classic" here to mean anything that has an excess of meaning, resists any definitive interpretation, and must be reinterpreted for each new generation.¹⁸ A good example would obviously be sacred texts, such as those found in the Bible. However, classics can be practically anything significant; they can range from dominant religious beliefs such as Jesus' uniqueness or divinity, the nature of salvation and wholeness, etc., to cultural mores or practices such as the notion of shame, the ethos of individuality, patriarchal cultural patterns, etc.

In step three, interpreters endeavour to converse with a chosen classic (re)interpret with a genuine openness to what the classic attempts to say while, at the same time, making their own ANA experiences and insights an important hermeneutical key to understand and dialogue with the text. In an explicitly liberationist approach, they will intentionally make their experiences of marginalization and oppression together with their faith and trust that the Divine stands at the side of the downtrodden, "bear upon" the hermeneutical conversation. The ideal, of course, is not to impose on the text but rather to open oneself up to new ways of being and understanding as a result of the hermeneutical conversation. Throughout this hermeneutical conversation, they will seek ways to realize ways to further integral liberation.

The fruits of this hermeneutical conversation depend on various factors, such as the quality of exegetical groundwork, the spirit of genuine openness to the other, the ability to make one's oppressive experi-

ences speak to and with a particular text, the critical sense to point out both wholesome and unwholesome elements (with regard to integral liberation) in the classic text itself, and so on. However, the very effort to make typically ANA experiences of suffering, misunderstanding, or oppression—such as racial profiling, the conundrums of a difficult-to-understand hybrid identity, or even an openness to religious pluralism in a generally monoreligious culture—hermeneutically communicate with and even “bear upon” a classic text (such as scripture) is itself a valuable exercise and an important step forward towards making an explicitly ANA liberationist interpretive approach make sense of classic texts such as the biblical literature, ultimately, for the purpose of furthering integral liberation in today’s globalized and hybridized world.¹⁹ Moreover, this effort gives more prominence to ANA experiences as a locus of biblical and theological reflection because they have not hitherto been given much prominence in what Tracy calls the three “publics” of theological discourse—the wider society, the academy, and the church.²⁰

Migrant Workers vis-à-vis Paul

This essay attends to different aspects of the lived experiences of Filipino migrant women, many of whom are mothers who have left their families in the Philippines. The reason for that choice is first of all deeply personal. Since coming to Canada some 15 years ago, this is the group that I have come to know quite well, as members of my immediate family and closest circle of friends have gone through such migrant experiences themselves. I propose to ask and give a theological response to the following set of questions: What are the particular situations and structures that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)²¹ and Filipino migrants²² (particularly women and mothers) encounter? In that situation, how might they experience some measure of liberation for themselves and other similarly disadvantaged fellow migrants?

While reflecting on these issues, the figure of the apostle Paul came to the fore for me. As I surveyed the many different intense and painful realities that many Filipina OFW-migrant workers face and tried to see how one could experience some kind of liberation in the midst of these harsh realities, the image of Paul and his many intense sufferings as an apostle leapt out at me from the pages of the New Testament. Paul, I thought, could be an important figure of comparison and inspiration from the New Testament when read in the context of Filipina OFW-migrant workers.

When Paul’s portrayal in the New Testament is juxtaposed with some typical OFW-migrant worker experiences, I argue that Paul’s life was similarly filled with various debilitating trials and sufferings, such

as the ones he describes in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33. Despite those sufferings, in the same letter (chapter 12), he describes a rapturous mystical experience by which he apparently could rise above his many sufferings and still keep focused on a wonderful reality that he could not even capture in words (2 Cor. 12:4). In my view, Paul could be interpreted as showing in a concrete way that an intense life with many serious challenges, such as the one experienced by many Filipina OFW-migrant workers, need not be an insurmountable impediment to the possibility of cultivating a deep spirituality that could sustain one and even enable one to get a glimpse of the liberative and transcendent reason for which one labours, with its challenges and sufferings. Engaging in the above-mentioned hermeneutical process suggested by Tracy will hopefully yield some liberative insights from a conversation between our concrete context and the figure of Paul.

Step One: Personal-Communal Contexts

Some reflections on my personal context will help frame the hermeneutical reading of Paul and OFWs as well as Filipino migrants that I am performing. I am an ethnic and cultural hybrid between maternal Filipino and paternal Japanese races and cultures, mixed with an abundant dose of Americanization since infancy. I have had multiple immigrant-diasporic experiences in life thus far: first, from the Philippines to Japan at the end of my teens, where I went as a young member of a Catholic religious order with the aim of becoming a missionary in largely non-Christian Japan. I was then sent to Europe (Rome) and the Middle East (Jerusalem) for graduate biblical studies in my late 20s. I returned to Japan, where I worked for a while as a university professor teaching biblical studies, with additional parish and seminary work. Finally, I came to North America, initially to the US (where I completed my PhD studies) and now in Canada, where I have lived and worked since 2005. That life journey has made me a hybrid migrant in a globalized world in which migration and hybridization characterized by asymmetrical power relationships between groups of people are happening everywhere, all the time, and in a dizzying array of forms. Since leaving the land of my birth, I have always been deeply inserted in immigrant communities while, at the same time, trying my best to be open to the dominant local culture(s) wherever I found myself. Furthermore, I was a member of a Catholic religious order and an active priest for a while. In that capacity, I ministered to and got to know very well many (particularly Filipino) migrants along the way, given the enhanced status of priests in Philippine society that prompts many Filipino migrants to approach their priests and candidly share their joys and sorrows.

My ministerial experience often took the concrete form of assisting Filipino migrants (predominantly OFW-migrant workers) with their different spiritual needs amid the many challenges they faced in the places where I was located (particularly Tokyo-Japan, Rome-Italy, Paris-France, and Toronto-Ontario, among others). Since settling in Ontario, Canada, I have also had extensive exposure particularly to the phenomenon of Filipino domestic workers living and working in Canada. In all these experiences, I have personally come to know many immigrants and witnessed firsthand the tremendous daily difficulties that they face, which are abundantly documented in various popular and scholarly studies of Filipino migrants in different parts of the world.²³

For this interpretive reading of scripture, I am immersing myself intentionally in the typical experiences of OFW-migrant workers, particularly women-mothers. This group faces some truly difficult experiences of adversity. To name a few, many of these women have left their homes in the Philippines reluctantly, in that they were forced by various harsh economic conditions to become OFWs or migrant workers. This situation stems from the systemic dysfunctional nature of Philippine socio-political structures at different levels,²⁴ including state violence²⁵ (embedded, of course, in different global systemic dysfunctions),²⁶ whereby masses of Filipinos simply cannot find a viable way to sustain their families in their home country. All this results in a “push factor,” whereby a significant number of Filipinos, particularly women, make the difficult decision to leave home and find work abroad for significantly better wages by Philippine standards, and thus regularly send home a remittance as a lifeline to sustain the family. My analysis here focuses on women-mothers, because there are significantly more opportunities for women than men to find types of labour in many developed countries.²⁷

After deciding to become an OFW-migrant worker, these women-mothers encounter many risks and difficulties of reaching what they hope would be a “promised land” (in terms of work and better wages). Once in the so-called promised land, they will have to contend with formidable challenges, such as (racial and class) discrimination, lack of legal status, shockingly low wages (compared to the average legal labourer in the new country), terrible working conditions, abusive employers, etc.²⁸

Moreover, there are often unfortunate consequences of being separated from their families back home in the Philippines, such as the crushing loneliness of prolonged separation and, more painfully, family breakdown mainly due to the prolonged separation; illness and the inability to pay for healthcare; among many others.²⁹ The above-mentioned factors are by

no means unique to Filipino migrants. They characterize typical immigrant experiences in many parts of the world.³⁰

In step one (of Tracy’s hermeneutical process), then, I (or the biblical reader) become intentionally aware of all these personal and communal contexts. I am mindful that the contexts and experiences in which I am immersed have left their indelible mark on me and formed in me a particular way of being-in-the-world and looking-at-the-world. They have forged me into the Bible reader I am today, and I bring them all into the act of confronting the classic text in step two.

In my case, the experience of pathos coming from witnessing firsthand the sufferings of Filipina OFW-migrant workers has acted, so to speak, as a “heart tenderizer,” in that this immersion has definitely worked to “tenderize” my heart in such a way that I have resolved firmly to view and relate with the world with a compassionate heart, especially sensitive to the suffering undergone for the sake of one’s loved ones, and to continue to further the cause of liberation. This is intimately linked to my choice of which classic to examine in step two of the hermeneutical process.

Step Two: Confronting the Classic – Paul’s Sufferings and His Unbroken Spirit

In step two, I will engage the figure of Paul in the New Testament in a hermeneutical conversation to see if this dialogue might tease out some liberative insights for people in difficult situations, like Filipina OFW-migrant workers. I am drawn particularly to Paul’s many troubles and travails as he proclaimed (his version of) the good news about Jesus, the Christ, around the Mediterranean world.³¹ Passages in Second Corinthians in particular directly touch on this theme, most notably 11:16-33. There, Paul enumerates his sufferings as a sort of boast in response to the challenge of opponents he calls “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5) or “false apostles” (v. 13) who tried to discredit him in the churches he had founded.³² Hence, he states the qualifications that make clear his authority as an apostle: he is equal in every respect to the false apostles in being “Hebrew, Israelite, descendant of Abraham, and minister of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:22-23). To further defend his integrity, Paul enumerates his many sufferings, which he continues to experience in the quest to fulfill his mandate from Christ.

[I am a better apostle] with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent

journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? (2 Cor. 11:23-29)³³

All Pauline letters, both undisputed and disputed, are practically peppered with references to various difficulties, which clarify that Paul lived an intense life marked by hardship and suffering at every step. A quick perusal through more focused biblical resources, such as a chart of Paul's sufferings, will make that immediately obvious.³⁴ What is more significant as I confront Paul and his "passion" (the dimension of his suffering-filled life) is that these intense tribulations did not deter Paul in the relentless pursuit of his mission; these numerous adversities failed to crush his vibrant spirit. In fact, earlier in the letter (as it has come down to us),³⁵ Paul says,

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Cor 4:7-12)

A sure and concrete sign of Paul's vibrant and unbroken spirit despite all these intense sufferings is that he maintained a spirit of thanksgiving that permeates practically all his authentic letters (with the exception, perhaps, of Galatians, where he is in an agitated state of mind due to a serious crisis). Of course, the Letter to the Philippians, which is also dubbed "the epistle of joy" because one of its major themes is thanksgiving, best illustrates Paul's ability to maintain a vibrant energetic spirit in an otherwise suffering-filled life. In 2 Corinthians itself (where Paul is most candid about his sufferings), these verses are noteworthy:³⁶

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. (2:14)

Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (9:13-15)

Step Three: Conversation between this Reader and the Figure of Paul

In step three, I, the biblical reader-interpreter, am intentionally aware of my embeddedness in situations in which the many trials of Filipina OFW-migrant workers are a daily reality, and engage in a hermeneutical conversation with the classic confronted in the previous step, namely, Paul's sufferings and yet his unbroken, defiant spirit. The ideal conversation will, on the one hand, try to be open to what the text says but, on the other hand, also try to make the reader's own specific location and context speak with, speak to, and even bear upon the text. My conversation with Paul might take the following form.

Located as I am in close proximity to and in the midst of the various travails of Filipina OFW-migrant workers, I deeply empathize with and appreciate the many sufferings of Paul in the pursuit of his mission. Like Paul, many of the Filipina women-mothers I know have lived and continue to live through countless very challenging situations because they are driven by something that is tantamount to a clear mission in life, a clear example of heroic selflessness.³⁷ The "mission" usually takes the form of "family" (in Filipino, *pamilya*, often understood as a big extended family, including relatives and even friends in the home country). The "mission statement" is often captured in typical expressions such as *buhayin ang pamilya* (enable one's family to live [often at the level of survival]) or *i-ahon ang pamilya sa hirap* (literally, to pull one's family out of hardship/poverty). Paul's relentless pursuit of his mission in spite of countless adversities is somehow paralleled by the relentless pursuit by Filipina OFW-migrant workers to (literally) save and sustain their respective families in the face of great odds.

Scholar of religion Karen Armstrong claims that the purpose of all religion is to achieve, paradoxically, the freedom of *ekstasis*, "a 'stepping out' from [people's] habitual, self-bound consciousness that enable[s] them to apprehend"³⁸ the Transcendent reality often known as "God." Paul (as we see him tending to his flock) and Filipina OFW-migrant workers (dedicating themselves to the welfare of their families), both at the cost of great self-sacrifice, are surely among the best candidates to achieve this "ecstatic" experience of freedom. The reality, though, is many times

not “ecstatic,” in the popular sense of this word. As I continue seeking to discover a liberative element from my conversation with the figure of Paul, I find myself asking at this point: What was the sustaining factor of Paul’s undying dedication to his mission despite great hardship?

A clue to Paul’s persistent strength can perhaps be found in the passage in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, which immediately follows Paul’s description of his sufferings. Here, Paul gives us a rare glimpse into his inner life, his spirituality (if you will), for he relates what is tantamount to a religious experience of the highest order, referring to his being “caught up into Paradise and hear[ing] things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat” (v. 4).³⁹ He follows that description with an honest recounting of his inner prayer life and serious struggles with a “thorn in the flesh” (vv. 7-10). These passages depict a deep spirituality in Paul, something we shall describe here as a profound and experienced relationship with the Divine. Various scholars have recognized the dimensions of mysticism, spirituality, and prayer as key to understanding the figure of Paul.⁴⁰ Prominent among them is theologian Albert Schweitzer’s classical work entitled *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*.⁴¹

So when we query the source of Paul’s unbroken spirit, strength of will, and interior freedom in the midst of crushing odds, we can claim that what kept Paul going was definitely a deep and lived spirituality that he maintained in the midst of all the difficulties and sufferings in the pursuit of his mission. For many years now, I have described spirituality or even the heart of all religion to my students using two words: depth and transcendence. I maintain that when one has resources for maintaining both depth and self-transcendence within oneself, then we can definitely say that such a one has an active spirituality or is living the heart of religion. In practice, depth and transcendence (as spirituality) are often cultivated through participation in a religious tradition.⁴² However, more and more common today, especially among young people (such as the “Spiritual but not Religious,” the “Nones,” or the “Dones”),⁴³ is a so-called spiritual quest that need not necessarily be attached to an established religious tradition.

The Necessary “First Factor” – Inner Liberation

Here we can perhaps identify a liberative strand from Paul that could be offered to people in contexts of various oppressive sufferings, such as Filipina OFW-migrant workers. That is, cultivating (religiously speaking) spirituality-religion or (in more humanistic terms) depth and transcendence can act as a crucial first liberative factor in one’s concrete context. The

need for an active struggle for justice in the midst of tremendous systemic oppression and the overcoming of “empire” (in all senses) have often been the focus of liberationist and postcolonial theologies. It is less common, though, for theology to deal with what I am tentatively calling the necessary “inner dimension” of the quest for true freedom and liberation. This is an area that should really be further emphasized as the necessary first factor in the whole liberative process. What are the inner resources that enable us not to be crushed by oppression, and also to take up the necessary *compromiso* (commitment) to continue the struggle for liberation? We can even very well ask: What is a fitting spirituality that should characterize the ones who seek to survive oppression and continue the fight for justice?⁴⁴

I can only touch the tip of the iceberg of this question here in my hermeneutical conversation with Paul, but I sense that the apostle may have important things to teach us, and in particular Filipina OFW-migrant workers in the midst of their struggles. The late British Pauline scholar F.F. Bruce entitled his book *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*.⁴⁵ The latter part of the title is practically a paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,”⁴⁶ and is very suggestive for our reading of Paul here. It forms the basic insight that I take away from my engagement with Paul as I keep in mind the context of Filipina OFW-migrant workers and their difficult circumstances: The figure of Paul suggests that the cultivation of an inner liberative spirituality in the midst of a life full of adversity is possible and, moreso, necessary for survival, flourishing, and the continuing effort to work for integral liberation, not to mention as a safeguard against burnout. In Paul’s case, it was his deep spiritual life (also referred to as “mysticism”). In the case of Filipina OFW-migrant workers, it might translate into maintaining inner resources of depth and transcendence so that, first, one would not have one’s spirit crushed by the many tribulations of life and, second, to move in some way to seeking a more integral state where liberation and justice are more fully present in one’s situation. After all, as the legal principle says (in Latin), *Nemo dat quod non habet* (No one gives what they do not have). In the same way, the struggle for liberation cannot be undertaken by those who have not yet experienced freedom within themselves.

“The Crack that Lets the Light In”

If cultivating an interior spirituality of liberation and freedom is the initial step, then it has to be followed by the effort to locate the struggles of Filipina OFW-migrant workers in the wider context of the globalized capitalistic and neoliberal structures that arguably produce both at the local and global levels forms and

cycles of oppression: the need in the more developed countries of what is commonly known as menial labour or unskilled labour, forms of labour that are more readily done by immigrants, and the counterpart or corollary huge surplus of people in the developing nations that see this labour as a viable way of supporting their families.⁴⁷

The many forms of injustice writ-large in this bigger picture are clear, but that structural analysis from a theo-political perspective is a task for a different occasion. Let me just observe that as I survey the situation of Filipina OFW-migrant-workers within these systemic structures of oppression, I note with perplexity that the grim shadow of neoliberal consumeristic global culture falls everywhere, even within the very souls of many oppressed OFW-migrant workers in the context in which I am situated. In many cases, oppressed people prefer to “sit by the fleshpots and eat their fill of bread” in “Pharaoh’s house” (Ex. 16:3) rather than be on the road to freedom in the wilderness. Tackling that theme is also a task for another occasion.

My aim in this study is more modest. I am looking for that little “crack that lets the light in,”⁴⁸ a light that would constitute a sign of resistance to oppression and that lets us experience some measure of liberation. That small factor is the liberative experience of a “heart that is set free.” When that inner liberation is present in some measure, it will necessarily be followed by more concrete efforts to struggle against and achieve liberation from the many oppressive structures that surround us.

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4 *Ibid.*, 24.

5 *Ibid.*, 24–25. Also, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15th Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 6–9.

6 Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 177. See also Peter C. Phan, “A Common Journey, Different Paths, the Same Destination,” in *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 26. The latter article is particularly significant because it is a clear and coherent description of the methodology of liberation theology by someone who is himself an Asian North American scholar.

7 One can get a good picture of the rich variety of liberative theologies by perusing Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Introducing Liberative Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015) and Christopher Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). A good succinct introduction to liberation theology is Miguel A. De La Torre, *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

8 Anthony Thiselton, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), ch. XIII, section 5, 271–76.

9 Praxis means a practical commitment to seek and effect liberation in concrete ways.

10 Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutiérrez*, 12–13.

11 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxvii, 156.

12 See Robert Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 99.

13 Some useful works that elaborate on liberation theology applied specifically to biblical studies are Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, eds., *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), and Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, 2nd rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

14 A good recent resource for this is Kim & Yang, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Hermeneutics*, particularly Part One, which deals with the contexts of major Asian American groups; among these (for the Filipino context in the US) is Lester Edwin J. Ruiz’s “Filipinos in America: A Cartography of Diasporic Identities,” 40–53.

15 Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Theology from the Underside of History,” in *The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 178.

16 David Tracy, “Theological Method” in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter Hodgson and Robert King (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 35–60.

17 For another piece of this methodology in action, see Julius-Kei Kato, “The Pathos of Mark’s Jesus and the Pathos of Migrant Life: Migration as a Source for Theology and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Religion and Migration: Negotiating Sites of Hospitality, Resistance, and Vulnerability*, eds. Andrea Bieler, Isolde Karle, HyeRan Kim-Cragg, and Ilona Nord (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019), 201–16.

18 These thoughts are based on David Tracy’s reflections in *Plurality and Ambiguity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 11–12.

19 For a fuller discussion on interpretation in the context of Asian North American cultures, see Kato, “Interpretation,” 63–75.

20 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 5.

21 OFW has the connotation of being in a temporary state as a worker outside the Philippines with the intention to return to the home country.

22 I will use “migrants” to refer to Filipinos who have migrated to other countries and are working there permanently but still continue to be disadvantaged in many ways.

23 See, for example, Rhacel Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Rhacel Parreñas, *Servants of*

Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015); Geraldine Pratt, *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Aurora Almendral, "Why 10 million Filipinos endure hardship abroad as overseas workers," *National Geographic*, December 2018, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/12/filipino-workers-return-from-overseas-philippines-celebrates> (accessed Sept. 15, 2019).

24 Parreñas, "The Global Economy of Care," in *Children of Global Migration*, ch. 1.

25 Pratt, "Acting on Attachments: Intimate Witness to State Violence in the Philippines," in *Families Apart*, ch. 5.

26 Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Living on the Edge: Migration, Globalization, and the Unskilled Worker," in *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), ch. 1.

27 Parreñas, "The Crisis of Masculinity," in *Servants of Globalization*, ch. 6.

28 Parreñas, "Contradictory Class Mobility," in *Servants of Globalization*, ch. five; and Cruz, "Old Challenges, New Contexts, and Strategies: The Experience of Migrant Women," in *Toward a Theology of Migration*, ch. 2.

29 Pratt, "Waiting and the Trauma of Separation," *Families Apart*, ch. 5; also Pratt, "Listening to Mothers' Stories," in *Families Apart*, ch. 3.

30 Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

31 I recommend the following good biographies of Paul by eminent scholar-writers to get a good glimpse of Paul and the various challenges he faced: Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: His Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), particularly ch. 7–10; Karen Armstrong, *St. Paul: The Apostle We Love to Hate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), ch. 4, "Opposition," 69–87; Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 77–93; N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York: HarperOne, 2018), particularly ch. 7–12.

32 A fascinating study of this conflict at Corinth is provided by Michael Goulder, *Paul and the Competing Mission at Corinth* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001).

33 Biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

34 Donnie Barts, *Bible Charts: The Sufferings of Paul* (2012), <http://www.biblecharts.org/apostlepaulcharts/15%20-%20The%20Sufferings%20of%20Paul.pdf> (accessed Sept. 11, 2019).

35 There are problems regarding the integrity of 2 Corinthians. See, for example, Victor Paul Furnish, "Corinthians, Second Letter of Paul to the," in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (rev. and updated), ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

36 The following piece might be a helpful illustration. It deals with Paul's sufferings and his continued spirit of gratitude: Lori Colbi, "The Apostle Paul: A Life of Suffering and Gratitude," *LetterPile* (August 22, 2019), <https://letterpile.com/creative-writing/The-Virtue-of-Gratitude> (accessed Sept. 11, 2019).

37 Having said that, in many cases, Filipina OFW-migrant workers do need to take better care of themselves and not just one-sidedly sacrifice themselves for the welfare of their families.

38 Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 391.

39 A noteworthy study is Alan Segal, *Paul the Convert* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), ch. 2, "Paul's Ecstasy."

40 John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), ch. 4, "Paul the Mystic"; Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), ch. 3; and N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York: HarperOne, 2018), 430–32.

41 Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

42 For instance, there is much happening in the Filipino global diaspora in which concrete religious activities are used to strengthen the faith of Filipino migrants. See, for example, Julia Norlan, "Strengthening Filipino Migrants' Faith through Popular Religiosity," *Mission Studies* 33:3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341467>. See also Cruz, "A Pilgrim People: Migration and Spirituality," in *Toward a Theology of Migration*, ch. 6.

43 Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Linda Mercadante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

44 Works such as the following should be given more prominence: Jon Sobrino, *The Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003); and more recently, Leonardo Boff, *The Following of Jesus: A Reply to the Imitation of Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2019). See also Segundo Galilea, "The Spirituality of Liberation," *The Way* (July 1985): 186–94.

45 This is the title of the American edition of what was originally *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* in the British edition. F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).

46 2 Corinthians 3:17 is rendered in the Basic English Version of the New Testament as "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there the heart is free." The Holy Bible in Basic English, <http://www.o-bible.com/bbe.html> (accessed Sept. 13, 2019).

47 Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, ch. 1 and 2.

48 From Canadian singer Leonard Cohen's song "Anthem." See Cassie Werber, "'There is a Crack in Everything, That's How the Light Gets In': The Story of Leonard Cohen's 'Anthem,'" *Quartz*, November, 11, 2016, <https://qz.com/835076/leonard-cohens-anthem-the-story-of-the-line-there-is-a-crack-in-everything-thats-how-the-light-gets-in> (accessed Sept. 19, 2019).

Unintelligible Cruelty

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One of the most important things that domestic workers can provide is actually what they can teach us about humanity itself and about what it will take to create a more humane world for our children. In the face of extreme immorality, domestic workers can be our moral compass. And it makes sense, because what they do is so fundamental to the very basics of human need and humanity. They are there when we are born into this world; they shape who we become in this world; and they are with us as we prepare to leave this world.¹

There is a scene early in Alfonso Cuarón's 2018 much-lauded film *Roma*, which tells the story of Cleo, an indigenous domestic worker serving a white, middle-class family—parents, four kids (three boys and a girl), a grandmother, and a dog—in Mexico City in the 1970s. The film itself is a semi-autobiographical tribute to his own nanny Libo. The family is undergoing crises of its own: the father walks out on the marriage not long after being introduced to us; the mother and grandmother are doing their best to keep the household running, what with the added financial, social, and emotional strain. The scene I have in mind, though, portrays a quiet intimacy. The family have gathered to watch TV together, piling onto the couch and floor in front of the screen, and the youngest boy gently puts his arm around Cleo and leans on her... until she has to get up to answer the phone or a doorbell.

I mention this scene because I think of both the film *Roma* and the late Alex Tizon's 2017 essay "My Family's Slave"² as works cut from the same cloth. Each one reveals a tenderness for its subject, an attempt to see this mysterious person in their lives as fully human, with their own dreams, desires, and experiences, as women who are more than the work they do, often invisibly and unacknowledged. Cuarón and Tizon are actually contemporaries, just a few years apart in age. Each man reaches back in time to tell the story of the woman who raised him—"the other mother"—and helped keep the family together. Cuarón's backdrop is that of the social and political unrest he lived through in 1970s Mexico, while Tizon's is that of countless uncertainties and disjunctions he experienced growing up as a child of Filipino immigrants to the Pacific northwest of the 1970s and 80s.

In the process of migration—in the shift from one home to another, one culture to another, and especially one generation to another—what was once taken as normal, ordinary behaviour becomes an unintelligible cruelty that does not translate neatly in diaspora. "My Family's Slave" serves as the basis for this theo-ethical reflection on modern-day slavery. Drawing jointly from Catholic social teaching, feminist ethics, and ethnic studies as critical lenses, this essay will explore complex intersections of gendered labour, economic exploitation, and physical and emotional violence endured—misunderstood and debated even until now.

First, a summary of the essay that is the main conversation partner here: Alex Tizon was a second-generation Filipino American Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. This article, "My Family's Slave," would turn out to be the last thing he wrote and published before his untimely death at the age of 53. As his longtime editor and colleague Jacqui Banazynski wrote, "[Lola] was his first memory, and his last byline. She was the secret he never told, and the story he said he was born to write."³ Famously, *The Atlantic* had chosen it for its June 2017 cover story in March. Tizon had died unexpectedly in his sleep the night before; he never heard the news from his editors, and the two events were a sad coincidence.

"My Family's Slave" tells the story of Eudocia Tomas Pulido, a distant relative whom Tizon grew up calling *Lola* (grandmother). She was his family's *yaya* (nanny) and *katulong* (domestic help) for 56 years. Lola came from the poor, mostly illiterate side of the clan: born the third of six children to two subsistence farmers. As a child, she was forced to quit school and instead work alongside her family in the rice fields. In 1943, when she was 18 and found herself unwilling to enter an unsuitable marriage to a pig farmer more than twice her age, the family patriarch made her an offer she could hardly refuse. Colonel Tom, as he was known, was a military man whose wife had died in childbirth: he offered Eudocia food and shelter in exchange for caring for his daughter Leticia Asuncion, then 12 years old. In effect, the lieutenant gave Leticia her own *utusan* (one who takes orders), Eudocia, as a birthday gift. On the one hand, this job offer was potentially a way out of dire poverty and a difficult situation. It resembles so many other stories in which a parent without means releases a child into the world—through a formal or

informal adoption, guardianship, emancipation, abandonment, or other means—hoping they stand a better chance of improving their lot on their own, ideally in a more stable and nurturing environment. On the other hand, though, Eudocia did not realize that—by sheer luck of the draw, given the girl taking her on a servant—she had effectively surrendered most of the rest of her life to those who would not respect her fundamental human dignity and certainly did not have her best interests at heart. Until nearly the end of her life, she bore the weight of profoundly asymmetrical powers working against her. All told, she ended up raising three generations of Tizons: first Leticia, then Alex and his siblings, and finally the grandchildren.

Tizon intersperses his memories of Lola with his journey to back to her hometown of Mayontoc. Five years after her death, he brings her ashes home to her few remaining family members to have her interred at the local cemetery, Eternal Bliss Memorial Park. He treats those ashes with the reverence of relics, and the box they came in as a reliquary. By his telling, this trip comes across as part moral obligation, part attempt at restitution, and part pursuit of closure. Around the age of 11, he began to realize the gravity and impossibility of Lola's situation. He could not unwitness and unknow the injustice and abuse she suffered; as he grew older, and especially once his own mother died, he sought to make life easier for Lola, giving her a version of freedom to which she never quite became accustomed: an allowance of her own that she could at last spend as she pleased (though, more often not, she still sent the money home to her relatives) and some return of all the care she had invested in his family—*her* extended family, in fact—all their lives. She lived with him 12 more years, until her death at the age of 86.

Once Tizon encounters Lola's remaining family and friends, they do not say much at all. Instead, they apparently howl their grief at the cemetery and adjourn for a meal afterward. In the days after publication, journalists and cultural critics in the Philippines proper took it upon themselves to do their own digging and interviewing, trying to record stories and reactions from Eudocia's remaining relatives and friends. (Perhaps the most moving and affecting one is a 2017 interview with her remaining older sister Gregoria, who suffers intermittent memory loss at her advanced age, but remembers keenly and painfully Eudocia's departure and long, silent absence.⁴)

Lola's story, told from Tizon's perspective, is a complicated one for many reasons, and it also presents us with intersecting modes of violence for our reflection and challenge. He portrays several types in his account of her life and the family's reckoning with its history and legacy. First of all, we see the *economic* violence that Eudocia suffers during her lifetime. Beyond

her fundamental condition of dire poverty, which limits the range of her agency and life choices early on as a young woman, she suffers further once Tizon's parents talk her into accompanying them to the United States in 1969 as part of the father's work at a consulate. The parents promise her better working conditions and an allowance that she can then funnel home to better the lot of her own immediate family... except that never actually happens. That promise is broken over and over again, and Lola realizes she is trapped. That entrapment, it turns out, is financial, geographic, and cultural. It is the latter kind especially that does not translate neatly from old world to new, from the Philippines to the United States. The practices, histories, and myths of each place intersect in ways that confound Tizon and bind him to Lola more tightly.

When Tizon's father leaves diplomatic work, he secures permanent resident status for his family... but not Lola. In fact, it is unfortunately a common enough occurrence for diplomats to use their immunity from prosecution in the United States to break all kinds of labour laws when it comes to the treatment of their personal domestic workers. Advocates for workers' rights and immigration reform argue that "by tying immigrant workers to a particular employer, the U.S.'s immigration system enables slavery." The laws allow employers an incredibly high degree of control with their workers, who are vulnerable to trafficking and abuse, and are threatened with deportation and financial ruin, among other possible negative outcomes.⁵ Thus, when Lola's work papers expire five years later, she effectively becomes an undocumented person who stays hidden and isolated to survive—what is known as TNT or *tago ng tago* (hiding and hiding), but is exploited in the process. This economic violence that "necessitates" such undesirable work is commingled with *sociocultural* violence as well as *emotional* violence. Historian Vicente Rafael writes about the existence and practice of slavery prior to Spanish colonization of the Philippines; it is different from the chattel slavery that exploited people of African descent in the United States and throughout the Americas, relying heavily instead on "affective ties of pity (*awa*), reciprocal indebtedness (*utang na loob*), and shame (*hiya*)" to power this (im)moral economy.⁶ The legacy of colonialism pairs with the religious dimension to add layers of its own: obedience to the point of martyrdom, dynamics of acquiescence and subjugation, the eternal pursuit of goodness and merit, the glorification of suffering, and more besides.

Lola works hours and days on end without breaks or time off. She does not get paid, she does not have even her own room with a proper bed, she is often prevented from seeking out doctors and dentists to care for herself, and she is even denied the chance to go home to care for her own parents and lay them to rest

as each one dies. The Tizon parents take turns berating her, taking out on her the frustrations they cannot express freely in the world of work and whiteness beyond the home. Alex's mother, Leticia, in particular sees Lola as competition for the children's affections—a phenomenon that Shakira Sison calls "outsourced love" in reflecting upon her emotionally complicated relationship with her own *yaya*.⁷ In the end, the appeals to family are both selective and manipulative. Later this returns for Tizon, too, when he challenges his mother about her often-abusive treatment of Lola.

Adding to these multiple dimensions of violence is the conceptual violence we bring to the issue. This essay will develop that idea more fully later in reviewing how Tizon's article was originally received and critiqued. For now, suffice it to say that it challenges Filipino and non-Filipino, Catholic and non-Catholic, colonizer and colonized to rethink what each of us understands enslavement, servitude, trafficking, and poverty to mean, and in what ways we are all complicit in the existence and perpetuation of these practices.

As one might imagine, in this age of the thinkpiece, "My Family's Slave" quickly drew hundreds of responses and follow-ups, attacks on Tizon's surviving family (who were then still only a few weeks into grieving the husband, father, and brother they had lost so suddenly and unexpectedly), and mobilization efforts from human rights and workers' rights organizations. These responses fell into several clusters, outlining for us what violence, resistance, and transformation look like in facing the issues the essay raises:

1. "Can the subaltern speak?": With a tip of the hat to literary theorist Gayatri Spivak, we must raise the familiar question. Moreover, who *is* the subaltern in this story? On the one hand, it is a story that tells a particular Filipino experience from a male Filipino American perspective, a brown person reconstructing another brown person's tale (insofar as he can piece it together), a semi-colonized/semi-privileged person peeling back the curtain for the colonizer to see what lies behind. However, it is also an instance of the slavemaster's son telling the story of the slave: Tizon is the one who has the power of the word, while Lola's power instead lies in silence, forbearance, and a complicated sort of love. We never really get to hear her in her own voice. She was illiterate, and what we learn of her comes through someone else's voice and worlds—not just Tizon's, but also his family's, and her own back "home." Arguably, his story of Lola is a slice of memoir, his effort to make sense of an existence he could not imagine had he not been living with it himself. Writing it in this way—and even ending the piece as abruptly as he does—is a call for forgiveness and

absolution: Did he really do his best to improve her lot? Furthermore, it is also a larger effort to reconcile for himself the perpetual and persistent question of identity: How Filipino am I? How American am I? What do I do with these parts of my inherited culture that I reject and abhor, that cause me shame? If it had been researched and written like any other piece of investigative journalism, the tone and effect could well have been quite different.

2. Context matters: We are tempted to judge without understanding Filipino culture and history in proper context, and also to draw at best approximate or imbalanced analogies to US history's own experience with African Americans as enslaved peoples,⁸ plus its further ventures in imperialism. Historian Vicente Rafael explains succinctly how slavery worked in the Philippines and reminds us that it took different forms in different cultures, societies, and times—indeed, American slavery is not the only model that has ever been practised. This is a key difference that the typical reader in the United States may lose in translation.

In pre-colonial Philippines and Southeast Asia (and many other parts of the world), practices of enslavement revolved around debt bondage rather than chattel slavery. For this reason, the master-slave relationship was highly contingent, depending on how much debt the slave owed to the master and the purposes to which the master sought to use his or her slaves. There were also fine gradations of enslavement that allowed slaves to change their status through intermarriage and manumission. Slavery was not necessarily a permanent state, in other words.

Pre-colonial Tagalogs had two main kinds of slaves, or *alipin*. The first was *alipin namamahay*, the slave who had his or her own house and family and, like a vassal, was expected to help the master during harvests, raids, trade, and feasts. A lower form of slave, *alipin sagigilid*, had less autonomy, lived inside the master's house, and was on call 24/7. Many of the latter were poor relatives who had fallen on hard times. Slaves could move out of their station through intermarriage with free or partly free people or through participation in commerce and raids. Hence, slavery as debt bondage was characterized by considerable flexibility and contingency.

The *alipin* structure changed with the advent of Spanish colonial rule. Spain abolished slavery but replaced it with forced labour, which can be considered a form of officially sanctioned enslavement, but not by way of the captivity and sale of people. Elements of pre-colonial practices of enslavement survive today in varieties of indentured servitude both in the country and among the millions of overseas domestic workers. Indeed, some Filipinos have referred to Pulido's en-

slavement as analogous to that of an *alipin sagigilid*.⁹ Filipina feminist author and activist Ninotchka Rosca goes on to connect the dots clearly and firmly: “The pre-Hispanic name for the household slave was *alipin sagigilid*—the *gilid* embedded in the term means ‘periphery’ or ‘on the margins’—a precise summing up of the relationship between the served and the one who serves: of the family, but not in the family.”¹⁰

Related to the preceding two points, though, are the defensiveness and self-reflection that kept surfacing in the critiques and reflections. Imagine Tizon’s shame as an immigrant child, hiding the truth of his home situation: difficult parents, strapped finances, and a beloved nanny abused daily belie the model minority he felt he had to portray. Imagine his further shame as an adult, knowing that his American and Filipino worlds, not to mention the generational differences besides, will not really understand each other’s cultural peculiarities; moreover, no matter what he does, he will be airing his family’s dirty laundry and making all Filipino Americans look morally backward in the process. By contrast, exposing and trying to explain the long-standing practice challenges Filipinos and others to take moral stock of how we actually treat the least among us and how we—if we claim to be people of faith and conscience—must absolutely take respect for human dignity seriously.¹¹ At the intersection of these cultures, we must discern what practices, beliefs, and values to keep as life-giving or discard as destructive. The cascading effects of poverty, perhaps more so than any other factor, show that much work needs to be done on multiple fronts so all may flourish and occasions for exploiting the less powerful will be much rarer.

One side question to this thread is whether a woman would have written about Lola differently. If Tizon had been a woman, would the moral challenge have surfaced and been addressed or even resolved sooner, too? If we look at the example of his mother Leticia, the answer might be “no”: think of the countless ways in which women can and do exploit each other. We cannot expect kinship merely from shared womanhood, or bloodlines, or other accidents of history, proximity, and intimacy.

3. Is the response adequate and proportional to the situation?: A frequent question among the criticisms was why Tizon did not do more to free Lola earlier on and send her home. She had effectively become an undocumented worker, a TNT, *tago ng tago*. Instead of allowing her to go home when Tizon’s father’s work and residency situation changed, the family kept her anyway, having become over-reliant upon her uncompensated labour. They did not even let her go home when each of her parents died, claiming that they could afford neither the time nor the money for

her. They were more likely afraid that she would not return and that they would encounter legal trouble for her overstay, which was certainly more their fault than hers. When all five Tizon children finally reached adulthood and had sufficient means to try and right the situation, they joined forces to intervene, pursuing both amnesty and a green card for Lola, as well as trying to shield their parents—particularly their mother—from significant legal repercussions. This was admittedly an imperfect solution, but it says something about the moral obligation they felt to both women, and the moral bind in which they found themselves.

This leads to the further question of whether reparations or some kind of greater compensation are in order, not just for Lola, but for the millions of others—Filipino and otherwise—who are in comparable situations. Consider the many ways in which overseas contract workers (OCWs) are exploited and manipulated now too—financially, emotionally, and physically—in ways often similar to an abusive marriage. Writer Lian Buan identifies with Lola on the painful choices that poverty imposed on her own family, and on the misplaced glorification of the American dream. She also expresses anger and outrage on Lola’s behalf: “What are the laws, whether Philippine or American, on human trafficking that had been violated in the unpaid employment of Lola? Would Lola’s relatives be able to claim compensation from the living relatives of the Tizon family?”¹² The Tizons’ freedom and relative blessings as a family do come, after all, at the expense of Lola’s suffering and dignity. For someone like her, how do you live your life knowing that you are marginal and invisible, whose power is profoundly limited, a piece in someone else’s game? You have little recourse for redress or reparations, having to depend heavily instead on the conscience and agency of others.

Indeed, Rafael makes a strong case that Lola presents a “resistant dignity.” Her silence about her own wants and needs, her emotional labour in holding this family together, her reserve in answering Tizon’s persistent questions as he seeks to make amends on his family’s behalf—all these seem to the sum of the agency she could muster on her own.¹³

4. Mobilizing for transformation: Transpacific human rights organizations such as Bayan USA and Damayan (which advocates specifically for and is led by Filipina domestic workers) mobilized on the strength and wide reach of this story, trying to draw attention to how common stories of modern-day slavery like Lola’s are, particularly among Filipinos. Profound poverty pushes over 6,000 people a day to leave the country for work that can sustain their families, and the overwhelming majority of those migrant workers are women.¹⁴

Theologically and ethically, the upshot is this: “do this in memory of me.” Catholics pray these words at every Mass. Memory renders the absent present and makes it real. Memory can also absolve, dispel demons, and lay the groundwork for transformation. It might be helpful, in the concluding section of this essay, to reflect on why Tizon felt compelled to tell his story of Lola, through his own vocational lens as the writer, the journalist: “Why do we need stories?” he wrote.

Stories give shape to experience and allow us to go through life unblind. Without them, the stuff that happens would float around in some glob and none of it would mean anything. Once you have a version of what happened, all the other good stuff about being human can come into play. You can laugh, feel awe, commit a compassionate act, get pissed, and want to change things.¹⁵

Like Tizon—by all accounts a thoughtful and compassionate man in addition to being a gifted writer—we must confront our complicity, even as theologians and ethicists. He felt, grew, and discerned his way through situations he could not have imagined and found difficult to translate. The love he feels for both Lola and his mother pushed the limits of his empathy; likewise, we have to push the limits of our moral and theological imagination to imagine something more possible, more just. He made himself vulnerable, risking looking ugly, wrong, and unempathetic in public. He had to realize that, by the point in life in which he “inherited” Lola himself from his mother, there was only so much that she could or would change. She could not entirely unlearn the habits and mindset of enslavement and exert full agency when those had apparently been mostly crushed out of her. What it would mean to go “home” after a lifetime away in captivity would have been perhaps a greater disjunction. Lola herself said that when she was finally able to go on an extended visit in her 80s, it no longer felt like home. The present did not match the past she had remembered. Above all, the people who would have been her anchors were largely gone. In her eventual freedom, the last 12 years of her life when Tizon takes her in, she finally gets to bloom and become more of a person, with her own wants and dreams, learning to read, growing old, loving and being cared for instead of being the one tasked with the caring. It is not an entirely happy ending, but perhaps the best one can hope for in this situation.

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Book Review

Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics

T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics.

Edited by Uriah Y. Kim and Seung Ai Yang. New York: T&T Clark, 2019. xviii + 526 pp.

This Handbook is an essential resource for understanding and engaging original work in Asian American biblical hermeneutics by diverse established and emerging scholars. Part One describes the historical and sociocultural contexts of six Asian subgroups, which together comprise 85 percent of the Asian US population: Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. Tamara C. Ho opens the book with an excellent analysis of the complexities and diversities involved in understanding, describing, and analyzing Asian American history, cultural production, identity, and religion. Ho draws on an impressive variety of activists, writers, artists, and scholars to orient the reader to Asian American studies, present the complex history of “pan-ethnic coalitional identity of Asian America,” and contextualize Asian American biblical hermeneutics.

The other chapters in this section provide skillful introductions to the six targeted subgroups. Russell Jeung draws out important factors that influence Chinese American readings of the Bible, including traditional Chinese cosmological beliefs and family sacrifice as well as theological orientation; the political context of migration; the racialization of Chinese Americans as “perpetual foreigner” and “model minority”; class and socioeconomic background; and generation in the United States. Mai-Anh Le Tran argues for a more complex understanding of Vietnamese America that recognizes its ethnic, religious, and socio-political diversity while looking for patterns of struggle suggestive for Vietnamese American biblical interpretation. Vietnam’s religious diversity and hybridization allow for cross-textual perspectives, while the trauma of war invites post/decolonial praxis-oriented interpretations.

Part Two critically assesses and develops major biblical hermeneutical methods for Asian American contexts. In eight chapters, this section tackles historical, social science, literary, theological, feminist, postcolonial, liberationist, and queer criticism. These chapters offer clear and concise summaries of each method while also pointing to limits, issues, or possibilities of each method, including historical critical and contextual methods, for Asian American biblical

hermeneutics. Intersectional analysis is raised in a number of the essays across the book, including in Dong Sung Kim’s chapter on queer hermeneutics. Kim develops a queer diasporic approach to biblical interpretation and underscores the need for Asian American biblical scholars to read scripture in light of (and to resist) contemporary systems of domination.

Part Three offers 22 examples of Asian American biblical hermeneutics in practice. Each chapter focuses on a different biblical text, and therefore could be read separately depending on the reader’s particular biblical interests. For even as similar themes cross the chapters—the foreigner, marginalization, exile and diasporic identity, liminality, migration, hybridity, trauma, and liberation—the chapters offer diverse approaches and perspectives. Sonia Kwok Wong takes a cross-textual approach that puts the book of Numbers into dialogue with Confucianism and the *Lienü zhuan* (*Biographies of Exemplary Women*). Wong reads Zelophehad’s daughters and their petition for inheritance rights as a rhetorical strategy to teach female virtue. In this case, a Chinese Confucian text (and its religious and cultural context) deepens understanding of a biblical text. Gale A. Yee, however, uses a biblical text to shed light on contemporary Asian American concerns. Yee argues that Isaiah 56’s inclusive approach to eunuchs and foreigners confronts the Asian American stereotype of “perpetual foreigner.” It also challenges the negative portrayal of LGBT persons as “sinners” in many Asian and Asian American churches. Jin Young Choi reads the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus in Mark 14 through the lens of postcolonial melancholia. For Choi, the anointing woman embodies the trauma and violence of war, imperialism, and patriarchy.

The Handbook will be valuable to scholars, undergraduates, graduates, and anyone interested in biblical hermeneutics or Asian American religious thought and practice. The authors and editors have crafted a volume with scholarly insight and broad accessibility for readers.

Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier

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Book Review

A Nudge from the Spirit

James Coriden. *The Holy Spirit and an Evolving Church*.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017. xiii + 210 pp.

James Coriden is a canon lawyer, academic dean emeritus, and professor at Washington Theological Union. In this concisely written book, he argues that the Holy Spirit makes the Church an evolving reality, and makes concrete suggestions about where and how this evolution should continue. Coriden's understanding of the Spirit is based in Scripture. Chapter 1 quotes extensively from the Old and New Testaments and provides appropriate commentary and discussion to build an understanding of the Holy Spirit as indwelling the Church, animating it to seek the coming of God's reign, and causing its teachings and practices to evolve in pursuit of this reign. Chapter 2 studies early Christian theological reflections about the Holy Spirit. He argues that by the medieval period, this basic understanding was complete. The Spirit was recognized as filling and guiding the Church and the driving force behind its evolution, through which new forms of ministry and new teachings develop to meet the emerging needs of new and changing contexts.

Chapter 3 returns to the synoptic gospels to develop a sketch of the reign of God from the ministry of Jesus. As the coming of God's reign was the focus of Jesus' ministry, so it must be at the centre of the Church's mission as the overarching goal that it seeks. The Holy Spirit makes the Church a dynamic reality that changes as required to serve the coming of God's reign. The Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of the Church's evolution, guiding it and propelling it forward. The reign of God, the ultimate goal of Church and creation, is the final cause that draws the Church's evolution forward. Through the Holy Spirit, God is present and active in the Church, inspiring good works and new initiatives, and granting people a sense of peace and meaning in the midst of a fractured world. The Holy Spirit gives life, unity, and movement to the Church, and directs it in all its forms on its pilgrimage towards the reign of God.

Chapter 4 examines the various gifts that the Spirit bestows upon the Church and its members. There are hierarchical gifts, special offices, and roles that have been established by tradition. There are also charismatic gifts that are signs of the Church's openness to God and its willingness to follow when the Spirit leads in new directions. The Church has the freedom

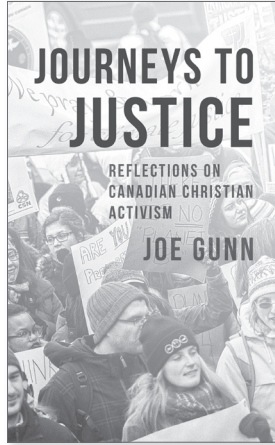
to make mistakes as it follows the leading of the Spirit. This leading is frequently exercised through prophetic voices and group discernment. Coriden notes that these voices may be heeded by the institution or ignored. If the Church is to be faithful to the Holy Spirit, it must always heed these voices with discernment.

Chapter 5 lays out Coriden's understanding of where and how the Holy Spirit is leading the Church to evolve today. He focuses first on Pope Francis' call for the Church to become a listening community by following the path of synodality, which means adhering to the principle of subsidiarity. Local decision-making bodies such as the Synod of Bishops, bishops' conferences, diocesan pastoral councils, and parish councils should be strengthened, and lay people given a voice within them. While unity in essentials must be maintained, regional diversity is welcomed. Turning to the issue of ministry, Coriden notes that in the United States, the shortage of priests is causing a eucharistic shortage, which could be solved by admitting married men to the priesthood—merely a change in policy, not in doctrine. Women also should be admitted to the priesthood. Coriden notes that both these changes should happen only when lay people and local cultures are ready to accept it. Surely these conditions presently exist in some Roman Catholic dioceses in the United States. Coriden also suggests that the diocesan Church have more say in assessing the qualities needed in a new bishop and that the practice of having auxiliary bishops be restrained. Relatedly, chapter 6 looks at the sacraments. In light of the "marriage crisis" in the United States, the Church's ministry to married people should be changed to supporting marriages and families, including moving the process of ecclesial reconciliation for divorced persons out of the juridical and into the moral order.

Through this accessibly written and well-argued book, the Holy Spirit is nudging the Church to evolve so as to better fulfill its calling as the people of God. This book should be read by lay people and all ordained leaders in the Church. It deserves to be widely discussed.

Don Schweitzer

St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon



Journeys to Justice *Reflections on Canadian Christian Activism*

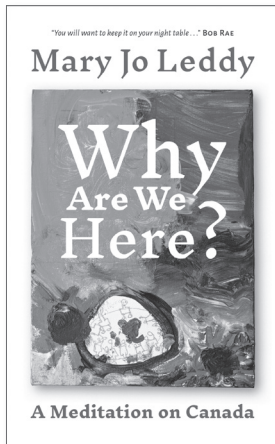
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Joe Gunn is a long-time leader within ecumenical Canadian justice struggles. He is based in Ottawa.

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Subscriptions: Canada: \$16 • International: \$33 (postage and taxes included).

To order: Periodicals Dept., Novalis, 1 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M4P 3A1

Tel: 1-800-387-7164 Fax: 1-800-204-4140

ISSN: 2562-0347

Please send submissions and correspondence to criticaltheology@novalis.ca.

Printed in Canada

