

PREFACE

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For its 8th annual conference, DaKaTeo focuses on the theme “Art and Theology at the Crossroads?” and examines the changing relationships of art and theology in a highly pluralistic world. The articles included in this publication explore this multi-faceted relationship.

In “**Estrangement and Engagement: The Passionate Dance of Art and Religion,**” the keynote speaker, René Javellana, proposes that the tripartite Vitruvian dispositions of *venustas*, *utilitas*, and *firmitas* can be the basis of a fruitful dialogue between art and theology, if these dispositions are considered not merely as a program of aesthetics but as concretizations of the metaphysical transcendentals, i.e., the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Javellana, speaking from the point of view of the artist who is entering into a dialogue with the theologian, goes back to an earlier moment—the relationship between art and religion. He employs the imagery of the passionate dance of a tango to describe this relationship as he perceives it today. In his view, art and religion at present are “midway between embrace and parting, at the moment where the partners are still holding hands and the man who leads the dance flings his partner and she pirouettes away. Whether she is thrown away, or returns to the center and the embrace, hangs in a balance.” In the face of this estrangement, dialogue will hopefully make the partners return to the center and embrace.

Religious practice or religion as *praxis* is the nexus between art and theology, and in this realm theology and art intersect. A fruitful beginning then for a dialogue between art and theology is to examine *praxis* and ask how much present-day artists are exposed to religion and how much theologians are exposed to the world of art. To

make dialogue meaningful, each must know what the other is doing. Theology can make art a *locus theologicus*. It can do a theological critique of art, and appropriate its methods, e.g., literary criticism. Likewise, art can make theology and its contents a *locus artium*, a source of inspiration for the arts.

Javellana proposes that theologians employ Marcus Vitruvius Pollio's tripartite *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas*, cited as "discourse-organizing structures or 'dispositions' for both artistic and theological fields." Vitruvius' tripartite qualities of good architecture are analogues or specifications of the transcendentals of metaphysics: the true, the good, and the beautiful. *Firmitas* relates to *veritas*, Truth. *Utilitas* relates to *bonus*, Good. *Venustas* relates to *pulchritudo*, Beauty. A deeper understanding of these "dispositions" would render them points of confluence for the artistic and theological tasks and discourse; they can serve as ideals which might illumine that path which art and theology can travel hand in hand, and thus work together fruitfully. With these tripartite dispositions, brought together in synthesis, "art and theology can approach [their]*locus theologicus-et-artium*, which is reality itself, or more specifically the human life lived against the horizon of transcendence and mystery. Life that will continue to provoke art-making and theologizing. Life, as both subject and horizon, in which and against which the artistic and theological enterprises are played."

In "**Kapag 'Ganda' ang Pinag-usapan: Isang Mungkahing Dulog sa Pagteteolohiya**" (*A Sensitivity to 'Beauty': A Proposed Approach to Doing Theology*), Rebecca Cacho and Estela Padilla evaluate 'ganda' as it is experienced and perceived by Tagalog-speaking Filipinos. Evaluating the results of interviews and focused group discussions, the authors lead us into a world of meaning which encompasses the physical, the relational, the social, and the spiritual dimensions of life. From this contextual reflection on the multi-dimensional aspects of 'ganda', the authors demonstrate how to employ a sensitivity to beauty as an approach to doing Filipino theology.

'Ganda' is the core reality of the human person and of God. People aspire for and employ as a measure 'what is beautiful' – experience, relationships, life. God, who is all-goodness, created us with an innate goodness. Jesus enfleshed and lived out God's

“kagandahang-loob” (*loving kind-heartedness*)(soteriology-christology) and dedicated himself to the mission of establishing “magandang samahan” (*beautiful human relationships*) (ecclesiology). Because of Jesus’ life, passion, death, and resurrection, we believe that earthly life opens out to a “magandang umaga” (*beautiful morning*) (eschatology) which we experience in fragments here and now.

Whatever is of beauty has an impact in our lives. Sensitivity to beauty as an approach to doing theology will require that theology be rooted in people’s lives and bear meaning for their experiences. Beyond orthodoxy (right doctrine) and orthopraxis (right action), the authors suggest orthopathos (sensitivity to beauty) to be the basis for doing theology. Sensitivity to beauty will bring to light the human experience of God’s “kagandahang-loob” as the fount of reflection on and study of faith-life.

Karl Gaspar moves the discussion to the prophetic theater stages in Mindanao. In **“Storming the Heavens, Confronting the Heathens: The Prophetic Landscape of the Theater Stages across Mindanao,”** he attempts a theological reading of the theater movement in which he was deeply involved. In his article, he begins a process of theological reflection on the movement, a reflection which he claims has not yet been undertaken.

Gaspar recounts that just before martial rule was declared in September 1972, there arose a nascent Mindanao Theater movement, which interfaced with the social activism that arose in the late 1960s owing to the strong conscientization-organization programs among peasants, agricultural workers, and the youth. Inspired by the ‘aggiornamento’ that arose out of Vatican II, various local churches across Mindanao, a growing number of priests, religious, Basic Christian Community lay leaders, and young people became militantly involved in engaging the social issues confronting them. There was a strong push towards creative methods and approaches to evangelization. A number of church pastoral workers who have had some exposure to theatre and the arts began to explore this creative field.

The imposition of martial rule changed the whole landscape of protest and resistance. The only institution that could dare to resist the dictatorship was the Church. Even at the risk of being arrested, tortured and imprisoned, a growing number of church pastoral

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workers continued to mount theatrical pieces that were prophetic in denouncing the evils of the military dictatorship. To minimize outright military harassment, the church-based theatre groups interfaced their theatrical productions with “religious themes” which could easily be highlighted if such productions were mounted during liturgical events like Christmas, Lent, and the feasts of the patron saints. Cloaked within “religious images and symbols,” these theatrical productions could still be mounted, especially inside churches, chapels, and Catholic schools to minimize the risk of military raids. The prophetic messages were not compromised.

Out of these efforts, theology and art converged. Productions went from morality plays to Passion plays. As priests, catechists, theologians, and artists worked together in artistic endeavors, the field became a very dynamic landscape for theologizing. Such productions stormed the heavens, invoking God’s intervention in the midst of severe injustice and oppression. The actors, taking the posture of contemporary prophets, confronted the “heathens” of martial rule.

From the theater stages of Mindanao, Rey Raluto takes us to outer space, and invites us to contemplate the earth photographed as one living organism. In **“The Earth Photographs and Ecological Theology,”** Raluto focuses on the visual art of photography, which, greatly enhanced by space exploration, has provided human beings with awe-inspiring photographs of the planet Earth.

The famous photographs of the Earth (e.g., the Earthrise photo in 1968 and the fully-illuminated photo of the Earth in 1972) taken from outer space by the astronauts of the Apollo missions, depict the Earth “as it truly exists.” Raluto emphasizes that the complex parts of the Earth appear to be wonderfully interrelated with one another; they form and emerge as a single whole. Earth and humankind appear to form a single entity. This perception awakens in people a desire to love this beautiful planet and enkindles ecological advocacy.

Confronting the climate change phenomenon, Raluto utilizes the insights offered by the “artistic” photographs of the Earth to develop an ecological theology. He challenges the prevailing anthropocentric perspective on the human relationship with the evolving cosmos.

He asserts that viewing the earth as one, living organism, inspires an ecological sensitivity and a cosmic spirituality. Contemplating the Earth photographs, he invites us to revisit some vital questions about our identity (who are we?), origin (where did we come from?), and destiny (where are we going to?).

The last article takes us on the notes of a song. In **“The Aesthetics and Politics of Appearance: An Insight into Surban’s *Apir*,”** Lope Lesigues finds poetry in every word of the song *Apir* and unravels the grave social implications of a seemingly innocuous and funny song. Asking his readers to bracket their *bakya* (mass, proletarian) accusations, he evaluates *Apir* from the point of view of Ranciere’s ‘equality of intelligences’ and thereby “affirms the capacity of those who ‘don’t know how to properly speak’ by speaking out, in halted logic and fragmented notes, a message too deep in its shallowness.”

In his paper, Lesigues “interrogates the ‘aesthetic judgments’ cast upon this all-too-familiar word in philosophic disciplines: ‘appearance’, which became an iconic expression of conviviality and fellowship among *kabayans* [fellow Filipinos]. The interrogation shall hopefully unravel the hidden politics and poetics in *Apir*-appear dynamics, especially as it titillates and tickles the imagination of fellow voyeurs – readers and myself.”

The word *Apir*, which goes with the gesture of clashing two open palms to signal friendship and amicability is popular, although not exclusive, among Pinoy’s. It is seen as a form of handshake, given in matches, in welcome parties, in bars, and in many other occasions. Some give it a topological explanation, ‘up here’ to signal ‘over the head’ or a ‘high five’ affirmation. Others believe it has a sociological explanation, referring to ‘*au pairs*’, persons who gather in Hong Kong’s Victoria Park or Rome’s Piazza Ankara on holidays. The laughter of hand-clasped ‘*au pairs*’ in public gatherings seems to announce a self-referential affirmation of identities. Then, there is *Apir*’s close proximity to the English word: ‘appear’. Lesigues thinks that this ontological correlation seems to warrant credence because of its corollary negative, ‘*dis-apir*’, which immediately waves out a gesture of disappearance or ‘erasure’. “For these reasons – topological, sociological, ontological – the reader may be persuaded to see that the de-automatization of an innocent lyric: *Apir*, and un-

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tangling lyricity out of its taken-for-granted receptions may yield an aesthetic of incarnation, of a Word-made-flesh in the social body that articulates it. Like any art, its muteness speaks volumes, and hearing it speak or spoken to *for the first time*, lifts us out of the *baduy* [pedestrian] existence ourselves and offers us possibilities of our own incarnation.”

We end our exploration with this idea of ‘the aesthetics of incarnation’. We started with Javellana’s aesthetics of architecture applied to doing theology, moved on to Cacho and Padilla’s aesthetics of beauty as an approach to doing theology, joined Gaspar in his attempt to do a theological reading of the aesthetics of community theater, considered Raluto’s visual aesthetics of photography which kindles ecological advocacy and cosmic spirituality, and finally, challenged our own social perceptions with Lesigues’ aesthetics of incarnation. Hopefully, this DaKaTeo publication tackling the relationship between art and theology brings us, not only into the conversation, but into the passionate dance.

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