

**LOOKING THROUGH THE EYES OF THE  
POOR AND IN SOLIDARITY WITH THEM:  
CONTRIBUTIONS OF TON DANENBERG TO  
CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

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*This article presents the contributions of Ton Danenberg to theology, the church and society. The author made use of his personal recollections of Ton as his formator, mentor, guide, and theology professor during his formation years and theological studies. He borrowed the notion of “identity enacted” from Prof. Johannes van der Ven in order to account for Ton’s contributions. Accordingly, “one’s individual and collective identity is not a phenomenon freely floating high above the daily, mundane lifeworld of ordinary people, but a process which has its roots and is embedded in the individual and collective activities people perform day by day, in both the short and long term.” One’s identity is enacted as praxis and identity come together. This implies that discerning Ton’s identity and contributions can possibly be traced through his written texts and actions, involvements, positions on social issues, engagements, etc. As one goes through the story of Ton Dannenberg, his writings, involvements, and advocacies, one can say that he has charted a life pattern that is coherent and anchored on the optic of the “Other” and of the poor, defenseless, downtrodden, marginalized, and exploited. One can rightly suggest that this is an enactment of his identity or his “identity enacted.”*

*“We still have to see a theology that proceeds from the people and goes back to the people; a theology which contains the lives and experiences and struggles of the people. This needs real immersion in the lives, sufferings, and struggles of the people. It is being written in the midst of the slums, in dialogue with the poor and their life-situations. It is that place where we have to listen and learn. It will, for sure, be*

*different from a theology written in an air-conditioned room.  
We must work and struggle for this theology - liberative and  
developmental of the people, and transformative for reality."*

- Isagani Valle

## INTRODUCTION

My way of coming up with this article about Ton Danenberg is through my personal recollection of him as a formator when I was a student friar and as my professor when I had a number of theological subjects at the Inter-Congregational Theological Center (ICTC). In addition, I conducted two interviews with him: first, on March 12, 2017 at their residence in Tagaytay City and second, a follow-up interview on September 17, 2017 at their residence in New Manila, Quezon City. I also interviewed senior Carmelite Friars about their experiences with him. Lastly, I read most of the articles which he had written.

As a wisdom figure of DaKaTeo, Ton's contribution to Church, Theology, and society can be framed using the notion of "identity enacted" as introduced by Prof. Jonnes van der Ven. In this view, "one's individual and collective identity is not a phenomenon freely floating high above the daily, mundane lifeworld of ordinary people, but a process which has its roots and is embedded in the individual and collective activities people perform day by day, in both the short and long turn."<sup>1</sup> This view means that one's identity is enacted as praxis and identity come together. In and through such praxis, people's individual-collective identity manifest itself and help people to come to understand themselves while giving other people the opportunity to observe and experience this identity, communicate about it and perhaps even participate in it. Furthermore, this view can be found in the philosophical and theological work of Paul Ricoeur, particularly in

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<sup>1</sup>Johannes A. Van der Ven, *Identity Enacted: Hermeneutics of Religious Communication (Course Reader)* (Nijmegen: Nijmegen Graduate School of Theology, 2001-2002), 4-5.

*Oneself as Another* (1992),<sup>2</sup> in whose work, a hermeneutically-laden and communicatively-oriented action theory in relation to the theme of identity plays a central role.

Discerning Ton's identity and contributions can possibly be traced through his written texts and actions, involvements, positions on social issues, engagements, etc. But I do humbly acknowledge that his life and his contributions to church and society are more than the sum of his involvements and writings (to which I had limited access). Indeed, I would be the first to point out that it is impossible for me to capture the entirety of his contribution through my written words and presentation. As pointed out by T. Singh, our language is limited,<sup>3</sup> and as Josh Traynelis would say, there is something in reality that cannot be put into words, for words would take away the overall message.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, I hope that I can fairly present Ton's contribution to Church and society, and give justice to him as a person.

### A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The complete name of Ton is Antonius Hendricus which is taken from his paternal and maternal grandfathers, a common practice in the Netherlands during his time. He was born on November 14, 1931, the eldest of three siblings. He comes from the coastal area of the North of the Netherlands (Noord Holland). After elementary school (around 13 years old), he entered the seminary of the Carmelites. He made his first profession of vows in 1952 right after his novitiate formation. After three years of philosophical studies in Dordrecht and four years of theological studies in Merkelbeek, he was ordained a priest.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113-115.

<sup>3</sup> T. Singh, "Limitation of Human Language," <https://www.gurbani.org/articles/webart183.html> (accessed September 25, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Josh Traynelis, "The Limitations of Language," <http://www.briancroxall.net/lit-tech/2012/10/08/the-limitations-of-language> (accessed September 25, 2017).

After ordination Ton pursued further studies in theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen and obtained a degree called *Doctorandus* (Drs) which is equivalent to a licentiate.<sup>5</sup> He also went to the Catholic University of Louvain for further studies in philosophy.

After his studies, Ton was assigned to Dordrecht, where he taught philosophy to Carmelite students. When the philosophical studies in Dordrecht were closed, the incumbent students were transferred to Amsterdam while the incoming ones were taken to Nijmegen. He was then assigned to Boxmeer as assistant to the Vicar Forane. During this time, there was an initiative from different congregations in the Netherlands to create a group specializing in group dynamics. He was one of the first products of this initiative. He was frequently invited by religious congregations to facilitate retreats and seminars in the areas of psycho-human development and group dynamics.

After three years, Ton moved to Amstelveen, where he was asked to work in the parish. He appeared to have moved to a problematic community, which he was tasked to troubleshoot. He was also asked to head the coordinating team for two parishes. However, the team did not work out well and was dissolved. The two parishes in question were separated. Ton became the parish priest of one of the parishes for five years, the Mt. Tabor Parish.

In 1981, Ton came to the Philippines. He humbly admitted that, at first, he did not know what to do. The first year was a trial period and acquaintance-setting whereby he was introduced to and was accepted by a group of committed and dedicated people. In one of his articles, Ton wrote: "From the very beginning of my stay, I would meet many people who were deeply committed to the cause, and I also got to know some members of the underground, often in hiding, some of whom would, shortly afterwards, be detained, tortured, or even be killed because of their involvement."<sup>6</sup> He

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<sup>5</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctorandus> (accessed September 25, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ton Danenberg, "Musings about Whats and Whos: Spirituality and Narratives," in *Fired from Within: Spirituality in the Social Movement*, ed. Ed Gerlock, May Rodriguez, Diego Quejada and Mercy Contreras (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2006), 287.

stayed at the Carmelite community in San Mariano and Iligan, Isabela where he met Fr. Pete Salgado, OP. Ton also visited Carmelite communities in the Visayas and Mindanao. He was initiated to realities in the Philippines and was slowly immersed in the life and struggles of Philippine church and society. He brought with him his enthusiasm in group dynamics, philosophy and theology. He was in the Coordinating Committee of Socio Pastoral Institute (SPI) and became Program Coordinator. He was part in the setting-up of the Task Force on Church Personnel (TFOCP). He also served as resource person in seminars and summer courses on Contextualization of Faith, Christianity and Marxism, Theological Reflection Process, etc.

Ton was involved in theological articulations, formation/education work and other activities related to the struggles for social transformation and for church renewal. He also taught theology and philosophy at the ICTC, aside from writing articles for various publications.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

I outline Ton's contributions to church and society through the following themes:

#### **Philosophizing and Theologizing for the Other: Looking Through the Eyes of the Poor and in Solidarity with them**

Ton was in love with philosophy and could engage in a high level of thinking and deep reflection. According to Fr. Bernard Roosendaal, O.Carm., a batch mate of his in the high school seminary, Ton was recognized as a person endowed with capacities for profound thinking and deep reflection. During sports time, while his classmates played football, he read a book even if he was also there.

Ton was led by his love for philosophy to discover love for the poor through the inspiration of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), especially the notion of the "The Face of the Other" as captured by statements like, "The face is a living presence; it is

expression. . . . The face speaks”<sup>7</sup> and “[T]he Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me.”<sup>8</sup> For Ton, the “Other” is no other than the poor people, the defenseless, the marginalized, the victims of injustices, and the suffering people.<sup>9</sup> According to John Wild, we are always affected by the Other: “The Other person as he comes to me in a face-to-face encounter is not an alter ego, another self with different properties and accidents, but in all essential aspects like me.”<sup>10</sup> And for Ton, no one can escape responsibility for the poor and from them. The Other makes us restless, a restlessness that does not stem from an inner void or need. There is always the poor who look at us. It is so because:

The Other has an authority by his or her naked presence; naked because of his/her undefined social position. And that presence makes me ashamed. I cannot reject that authority with good conscience. The Poor is my judge.<sup>11</sup>

In an article in the periodical *Carmel*, of the Dutch Province in the 1960s, Ton wrote, “Self-analysis for the Good of the Other.”<sup>12</sup> Well at home in the world of the philosophers of post-World War II and confronted as a professor of philosophy at the major seminary of the Dutch Carmel with the growing unease in the Catholic Church, he expressed in this article what might have cost him sleepless nights:

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<sup>7</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 66.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>9</sup> Ton Danenberg, O. Carm., *...Where there shall be no Mourning, nor Crying, nor Pain Anymore...* (Manila: Socio-Pastoral Institute and Forum for Interdisciplinary Endeavors and Studies, 1990), Series A5, 18.

<sup>10</sup> John Wild, "Introduction" In Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, Boston, London, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> Ton Danenberg, O. Carm., *Where there shall be no Mourning, nor Crying, nor Pain Anymore...* 18.

<sup>12</sup> Lucianus Danenberg, “Zelfontlediging: Ten Bate van Anderen,” *Carmel*, jaargang # 60, aflevering # 3, 246-257.

*Sinds korte tijd hoort men herhaaldelijk kritische geluiden over what dan genoemd wordt het “trionfalisme” van de kerk. Uit deze kritiek spreekt meer een onbehagen met wat zich aan overdaad in het Vaticaanse hofceremonieel ten toon spreidt. Er zijn wezenlijker digen gaande. Nu benauwend duidelijk aan het licht gaat treden, dat de kerk op grote schaal terrein verliest en dat zij sleutelposities op zal moeten geven”, nu is een radikale vraag ontwaakt, de vraag of de kerk met het veroveren en verdedigen van kerkelijk-politieke machtposities wel zuiver beantwoordt aan haar evangelische opdracht, de vraag of de gezindheid van Jesus Christus, die in ons moet zijn, wel aan het licht treedt, zonder dat er schaduwen over vallen.<sup>13</sup>*

In the above text, Ton argues that since it is frighteningly clear that the Church is losing its influence and power in society, we are confronted with a radical question: By occupying and defending her ecclesiastical-political position of power, is the Church performing correctly her evangelical mandate of letting the Spirit of Jesus Christ, which is supposed to be within us, shine without shadow? For the Church to be able to understand her own essence and reality, it seems that a revolution is necessary. But that also means taking the greatest risks, which is actually the only secure way that is still open. If the Church is able to present herself as the Church of the poor and can make the mentality of self-analysis of her Master as her own, we can say that an idea of real revolutionary power is awakening. It is no more a question of small cracks in the wall, easy to repair, but big cracks going deep down into the foundation of the house in which we live. What this all means is not easy to express in a few words but there is an energy emerging, of which we cannot grasp the consequences.

### **A Search for a Relevant and Contextual Faith and Theological Formation**

It can be recalled that in the Second Vatican Council, one of the important discussions was on the renewal of religious life and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

training of priests. *Perfectae Caritatis* discusses the principles of renewal, characteristics of religious life, different types of religious and special aspects of religious life.<sup>14</sup>

As pointed out by Adrian Hastings, there is no doubt about the continuing value and vigour of religious life in the Church. The Council Fathers recognized that religious orders and societies are an important part of the Catholic Church, and the fact that they are present even in several separated communions is noteworthy.<sup>15</sup> However, two issues need to be faced. First, although new societies are being founded, old ones seldom come to an end. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 forbade the foundation of more congregations, but more and more are being founded. The trouble comes from the multiplicity of small ones, especially when they are instituted for special purposes in particular situations with their own constitution and rules. They have continued to minister in a very different world, but their rules remain largely unchanged. Second, there is a contrast of understanding the motives for entering religious life. For example, on the one hand, there is the idea of “flight from the world” and on the other, “acceptance of the world” and its values as God-given, the need for participation in contemporary culture and the like.<sup>16</sup>

*Optatam Totius* is concerned with the encouragement of vocations, general principles of seminaries, spiritual training, intellectual training, pastoral training, and post-ordination training.<sup>17</sup> Its stress on human qualities acknowledges the need of priests and seminarians for human maturity and for a sound knowledge of the human being and the world.<sup>18</sup> This renewal

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<sup>14</sup> Vatican II Council, *Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life, Perfectae Caritatis*, In Austin Flannery. Ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new rev. ed. (3<sup>rd</sup> Printing) (New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc. & Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), 611-623a.

<sup>15</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (Volume Two) (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 185.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

<sup>17</sup> Vatican II Council, *Decree on the Training of Priests, Optatam Totius*, In Austin Flannery. Ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new rev. ed. (3<sup>rd</sup> Printing) (New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc. & Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), 707-724a.

<sup>18</sup> Hastings, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council*, 161.

introduced by the Second Vatican Council challenged Ton when he came to the Philippines and he had to design a formation program for Carmelite *formandi* in Manila.

With his expertise in psycho-social and spiritual dynamics and group dynamics gained in the Netherlands, he became part of a formation team. As a formator, he felt the impact of the killing of one of his students, Isagani Valle, who was then doing immersion among rural folks in Mindanao but was suspected of being involved in subversive activities in the area. Ton and the rest of the Carmelites received from Isagani this bold statement:

We still have to see a theology that proceeds from the people and goes back to the people; a theology which contains the lives and experiences and struggles of the people. This needs real immersion in the lives, sufferings, and struggles of the people. It is being written in the midst of the slums, in dialogue with the poor and their life-situations. It is that place where we have to listen and learn. It will, for sure, be different from a theology written in an air-conditioned room. We must work and struggle for this theology-liberative and developmental of the people, and transformative for reality.<sup>19</sup>

Ton is recognized as one of the prime-movers in the establishment of the Inter-Congregational Theological Center (ICTC). He recalled that it was at the Redemptorist Seminary in Antipolo where the concept of ICTC was born in January 1987 in the aftermath of the so-called EDSA Revolution. Everyone still had vivid memories of the hard and often fierce confrontations between the resistance movement and the Marcos dictatorship during mass demonstrations, arbitrary arrests, raids and in the overall atmosphere of oppression, insecurity and fear.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Isagani Valle, quoted by Billy Bong Manguiat, O. Carm., "In the Inserted Community" in *Brown Prophets*, vol. 5, no. 10 (May 2010): 25.

<sup>20</sup> Ton Danenberg, "The Philosophy and Theology of the Inter-Congregational Theological Center (ICTC) in Retrospect," *Himig Ugnayan: The Theological Journal of the Inter-Congregational Theological Center (ICTC) and the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies (IFRS)*, vol.1 No. 2, Second Semester (1998-99): 52.

One can say that the ICTC was an attempt to establish a contextualized and relevant formation. Its philosophy states:

Theological formation has to be rooted in a spirituality that is both critical and arising from solidarity with the life-realities of the poor and the oppressed. This spirituality is based on the following of the footsteps of Jesus, the poor man who emptied himself and did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (Phil 2:6-7) and his compassion for the masses (Mt 9:36). This theological formation, therefore, gets its inspiration from the basic conflict between the appalling situation in which we live and our daily prayer “Your name be holy, your kingdom come, your will be done.”<sup>21</sup>

According to Ton, the philosophy of ICTC was a product of the discussions of a small group of many concerned individuals, namely: students, religious and lay, and some provincials of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines.<sup>22</sup> He admits that starting the ICTC was not without difficulties; at its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he had this to say:

Where do all these considerations leave us today, ten years after we dared start ICTC? I say “dared” because indeed, putting up ICTC was against all odds and against all the rules of setting up a school. There have been ample occasions in these ten years that friends have raised doubts about how realistic ICTC is.<sup>23</sup>

It was not easy, but he is always reminded of a verse in Psalm 119: “Your torah is a lamp of my feet.” But the lamp will not show the way unless a person walks and continues the journey. The year, 2017, marked the 30th year of ICTC and I am proud to say that I

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<sup>21</sup> Danenberg, *ibid*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Danenberg, *ibid*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Danenberg, *ibid*, 49.

am one of its fruits and, hopefully, a good one, thanks to Ton and other visionaries of ICTC who dared to tread the odd way.

Based on the ideas of Ton, the following are some features of a relevant and contextualized formation:

**a. It takes the sides of the poor and is rooted in lives of the people.**

For Ton, an important element in the formation of religious and theology students is rootedness in the lives of the people. Integrated in the formation program of the Carmelites are their immersion and pastoral exposure to the life realities of the ordinary people, especially the poor and marginalized in society. This program was adapted by ICTC. This concept is also similar to what Danny Pilario calls “confronting the ‘rough grounds’ of everyday life.”<sup>24</sup> It confronts the daily struggles of ordinary people: the urban poor, the workers, fisher folks, prostituted women, street children, peasants, and others.

Ton asserts: “As Church and in theology, we are never apolitical. We should always regard the poor, first of all, as God’s creatures. In suffering people, we see the face of Christ. God is the God of justice, precisely because his commandment speaks in the face of the orphan, the widow, the stranger.”<sup>25</sup> The project of modernity cannot justify itself anymore; it is the Other who is the judge of what we achieved. It is the new manifestation of the spirituality of our times—a spirituality that is not centered on self, but one that seeks meaning in the desert of the modern city; a spirituality that is essentially characterized by sensitivity to the poor and to the Other; and a sensitivity that calls for a revolution to de-center the self.

Its practice is not negative asceticism that denies the self; rather, it confronts our radical finitude vis-a-vis the Other. It shows us that we can never be contented with the way we live, since there is always the Other—the widow, the orphan, the stranger. It also shows us that in the face of the Other, God reveals Self and

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel Franklin Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven: University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005), 538-539.

<sup>25</sup> Danenberg, O. Carm., “*The Philosophy and Theology...*”, 56.

the incomprehensible mystery of God confronts our power in and through its vulnerability.

**b. It is a down-to-earth Christology.**

Ton points out that if we look at the philosophy of ICTC, we might notice that it is inspired by and emphasizes a very down-to-earth Christology. It regards Jesus as the poor man who emptied himself and did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. It also stresses as the core of its spirituality the compassion of Jesus with the masses, a compassion that characterized him as Son of the Father.”<sup>26</sup> Thus he asks: What does it mean to know God, if it is not based on following the footsteps of Jesus as he walks in the midst of the exploited and degraded masses of the Philippines in the here and now? Jesus can be encountered among the workers in the factory, the urban poor in the slum areas, the farmers in the fields, the fish vendors, etc.<sup>27</sup> As early as the 1960s he was already speaking about finding joy through close encounter with the “other.”<sup>28</sup> This kind of understanding is corroborated in the famous song composed by Fr. Eduardo Hontiveros, SJ, which has these lines:

*Hesus na aking kapatid sa lupa nami'y bumalik  
 Iyong mukha'y ibang-iba hindi kita nakikilala  
 Tulutan mo aking mata, mamulat sa katotohanan  
 Ikaw Poon makikilala sa taong mapagkumbaba  
 Hesus na aking kapatid putikin man ang Iyong sapin  
 Punit-punit ang Iyong damit Nawa Ika'y mapasa-akin Hesus na  
 aking kapatid Sa bukid ka nagtatanim,  
 o sa palengke rin naman Ikaw ay naghahanap-buhay.<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup> Danenberg, O. Carm., “*The Philosophy and Theology...*”, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Danenberg, O. Carm., *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Ton Danenberg, “Geluk en de relatie tot de ander,” *Carmel...*

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Himig-Heswita-2/Hesus-Na-Aking-Kapatid> (accessed September 15, 2017).

**c. It is formation towards authenticity.**

Ton envisions authentic people as the fruits of formation and theological training. For him, education develops a sensitivity to people's search for meaning, and therefore, for a meaningful mode of living in the concrete circumstances of life. Only when we shall have developed that sense of meaning can we expect to articulate God's word in people's lives.

However, Ton acknowledges that the task is beyond the search for meaning. The philosophy of ICTC reminds us that formation should also enable students to unmask the illusory social and religious structures that not only suppress and obscure this search for meaning but also pervade our very way of life. Indeed, the structures we need to unmask are not outside or over us. They are in us. We are part of the church and society where we, religious and theologians, occupy a place and role of some privilege. Clericalism, in particular, is still a major characteristic of the Philippine church and the religious culture of the majority of the people. This fact makes it extremely difficult for all our goodwill to resist being attracted to the special privileges of being clerics, and to recognize and resist the manipulation of the rich and influential. It definitely tends to make us subservient, as well, to the powers-that-be in the church itself.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of clericalism is much alive today. This is what Pope Francis mentioned to the Somascan Fathers during their general chapter:

One of the gravest dangers, stronger in the Church today, is clericalism. Work with the laity, let them go ahead, that they have the courage to go forward and you, support and help them as priests, as Religious. This is a very precious service to the local Churches, in communion with the Pastors and in

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<sup>30</sup> Danenberg, O. Carm., "*The Philosophy and Theology...*", 61-62.

union with the whole Church and her living Tradition.<sup>31</sup>

## On Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue

In my interview with Ton, he recalled his assignment at Mt. Tabor Parish and his very good experiences with Protestants. Protestants and Catholics held common liturgical celebrations especially during the Holy Week. For example, on Holy Thursday, they worshipped together in the Catholic Church with the Catholic priest together with the Protestant pastor presiding during the Eucharist but with a Protestant pastor as a preacher. The Holy Friday was celebrated in the Protestant church, but with typical Catholic elements like the procession and the veneration of the Holy Cross. The Easter Vigil, which followed, was then celebrated in both churches with the procession of the Easter Candle in the park between the two church buildings.

The joint celebrations created a big impact on how Protestants and Catholics can worship together, both living harmoniously without fighting against each other. When it so happened the bishop visited the parish some weeks after the first celebration of the Holy Week, members of the parish council asked him about these joint celebrations, his response was, “I did not hear of any complaint from your parish. So you must have well prepared the people of your parish.” In other words, the bishop advised indirectly these ecumenical celebrations could continue as long as there is proper **education** among the people.

For Ton, relating with the ecumenical engagement is an important dimension in the expression of faith. He developed a theology that we should be open to dialogue with our Protestant brothers and sisters. In the 1960s, he wrote an article which discusses the way to reconciliation, “The Church and Peace of

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<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, “No to Clericalism’ (Pope’s Address to Somascan Fathers in Rome for General Chapter (March 30, 2017),” <https://zenit.org/articles/pop-es-address-to-somascan-fathers-in-rome-for-general-chapter/> (accessed March 31, 2017).

Christ.”<sup>32</sup> Ton was searching for an answer to a question beyond the centuries-old conflict between the Protestant and Catholic Churches. He was trying to address a pressing issue of that time: the rising conflict between the traditionalists, who wanted to maintain the grip on the power structures of the hierarchical Church, and those who were open to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Ton put forward the idea that the way to reconciliation, peace, and harmony is through the way of Christ.

### Advocacy for Human Rights

When Ton arrived in the Philippines, he witnessed the rampant violations of human rights. It is alleged that 3,257 persons were killed by the military during President Ferdinand Marcos’ dictatorship, specifically over the 10-year period from 1975 to 1985; that the military under Marcos committed gross human rights violations; and that terror and brutality distinguished martial rule.<sup>33</sup> September 21, 2017 marked the 45<sup>th</sup> year after the declaration of martial law that lasted 14 years (1972-1986). In her column, Ma. Ceres Doyo writes:

Etched on the Wall of Remembrance at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani are the names of 27 priests/pastors and religious (women and men) who fought the Marcos dictatorship. A number of them died violent deaths or are counted among the *desaparecidos* (the disappeared). Many of them fought and died without seeing the dawn...They are among the 287 individuals who are in the Bantayog ng mga Bayani’s roster of heroes.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lucianus Danenberg, “Op Weg naar Verzoening: De Kerk en de Vrede van Christus,” *Carmel*. jaargang # 70, Aflevering # 1. 32-41.

<sup>33</sup> Rachel A.G. Reyes, “3,257: Fact checking the Marcos killings, 1975-1985 (*The Manila Times*, April 12, 2016).” <http://www.manilatimes.net /3257-fact-checking-the-marcos-killings-1975-1985/255735/> (Accessed September 5, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, “Priests and religious fought Marcos tyranny,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 21, 2017, <http://opinion.inquirer.net/107302/priests-religious-fought-marcos-tyranny> (Accessed September 23, 2017).

Ton became involved in the issue of human rights. He was a staunch critic of human rights violations, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. On March 2, 1995, he gave a talk during the annual planning conference of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) where one can see his conscious efforts in bringing philosophical ideas to his writing. His talk is anthologized in an article which he began by saying, “My point of view is philosophy.”<sup>35</sup> At the CHR Ton suggested that “human rights are not the fruit of philosophical ideas. Philosophy comes in only as a reflection, a second thought. Human rights, as rights, are born out of the concrete struggle of people. They are not the making of philosophers, or lawyers, or commissions or of parliaments. Human rights are born out of pain and conflict. They are the fruit of life.”<sup>36</sup> He also warned that the issue of human rights is a sensitive one and can be manipulated by any party for its own agenda. He illustrated this point by a brief historical reflection on totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Then, he described human rights as the witness of woundedness and frustration, self-awareness and self-assertion, anger and pain. He pointed out that human rights are born out of protest when people become witnesses to their humanness and resist the forces that downgrade or crush their humanness.<sup>38</sup>

Respect for human rights can be gleaned from the divine command making us responsible for the “Other.” The famous text in Matthew 25 on the last judgement is not a myth on the so-called end of the world, because the judgement is here and now: “What you have done to one of the least of my brothers, you have done to me.” Ton called this the ethical foundation of all human rights by saying: “Human rights are rights of the ‘Other’ in his/her nakedness, and being rights that I cannot claim because of my position, money, prestige, etc. in short, because of my power.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ton Danenberg, O. Carm., “The Rights of the Human” in *We Did Not Learn Human Rights from the Books: The Philippines and Human Rights in the Period 1986-1996* ed. Evert de Boer, Huub Jaspers and Gerard Prickaerts (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1996), 163.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 177.

Finally, Ton challenged the CHR that it could not be anything but a catalyst. It must be the ear to hear the often-suppressed cries of the powerless, the eye to see what is not seen by the officialdom which rules our laws and our politics, the space and the sounding board for the voiceless.<sup>40</sup>

### **SOME CHALLENGES AHEAD OF US**

Based on the points that I have identified about the contributions of Ton to the Church and Society, I put forward the following challenges.

#### **On Philosophizing and Theologizing for the Other: Looking Through the Eyes of the Poor and in Solidarity with Them**

A recurring theme in the writings of Ton is his passion and love for the “Other.” The starting point of his philosophizing and theologizing is the optic of the poor, with whom he is in solidarity through his advocacies and involvements. A challenge that can be forwarded to us as members of the Church and as theologians is our openness in accepting his viewpoint. A second challenge is: Whom do we consider as belonging to the category of “the Other”?

#### **On the Search for a Relevant and Contextual Faith and Theological Formation**

Ton’s participation in the establishment of ICTC is an expression of his search for a relevant and contextualized faith and theological formation. Faith must be rooted in the everyday life of people and be connected with their daily struggles. For this we need to develop authentic people with down-to-earth Christology. But are our formation houses, seminaries and theological schools producing authentic people? We can study the message of Pope Francis during the World Day for Vocations:

Today too, Jesus lives and walks along the paths of ordinary life in order to draw near to everyone, beginning with the least, and to heal us of our

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 178.

infirmities and illnesses. I turn now to those who are well disposed to listen to the voice of Christ that rings out in the Church and to understand what their own vocation is. I invite you to listen to and follow Jesus, and to allow yourselves to be transformed interiorly by his words, which “are spirit and life” (Jn 6:62).<sup>41</sup>

## On Ecumenism

In this area, we can discern this challenge from Ton: How open and serious are we in terms of engaging in ecumenical dialogues and in achieving Christian unity? What kind of theological articulations have we done in order to promote this kind of endeavor?

The year 2017 marks 500 years of the Lutheran Reformation. How far do we engage in ecumenical celebrations? Do we provide educational venues for discussing issues that concern Christian groups in order to transcend our differences? And how far do we work together with Protestant churches on platforms for peace, justice and integrity of creation?

## On Human Right Violations

Ton’s advocacy for the respect of human rights is based on the ethical foundation that no one has the right to disrespect another person because, in the first place, we are morally responsible to each other. His challenge is captured in the phrase “to be the ear to hear the often suppressed cries of the powerless, the eye to see what is not seen by the officialdom and the sounding board of the voiceless.”

Human rights violations have worsened nowadays. The war on drugs by the Duterte administration has already curtailed

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<sup>41</sup> Pope Francis, “Message of Pope Francis for the 51<sup>st</sup> World Day of Prayer for Vocations (May 11, 2014),” [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140115\\_51-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco_20140115_51-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html) (Accessed September 23, 2017).

thousands of innocent lives. On August 22, 2017, the news agency Al-jazeera quoted a report estimating it at 13,000.<sup>42</sup> Even if the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 11 that “[e]veryone charged with a penal offense has the right to be **presumed innocent until proven guilty** according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense,” what is happening now is that one is guilty unless proven innocent. And so, a challenge thrown to us is to do what we can about the rampant violations of human rights. Where is our prophetic voice? As Asuncion David Maramba has asked in her column, “Is it not the time for a militant church?” She also expressed frustration at the seeming inaction of the Church this way:

I can no longer hold it back, having hoped that the Church would finally come around to issue more forceful words against the killings, the escalating climate of prevarication, vulgar conduct and words, entire groups of spineless lawmakers, and unbelievable decisions emanating from them.<sup>43</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Going through the story of Ton Dannenberg, his writings, involvements, and advocacies, one can say that he has charted a life pattern that is coherent and anchored on the optic of the “Other” and of the poor, defenseless, downtrodden, marginalized, and exploited. One can rightly suggest that this is an enactment of his identity or his “identity enacted.”

While writing this paper, I kept on playing music from YouTube in the hope of getting inspiration. It came when my attention was caught by the song “Looking Through the Eyes of Love” with these particular lines:

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/thousands-demand-killings-duterte-drug-war-170821124440845.html> (accessed on August 25, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> Asuncion David Maramba, “Is it time for a militant Church?,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 17, 2017, <http://opinion.inquirer.net/107175/time-militant-church> (accessed on September 18, 2017).

Please, don't let this feeling end  
It's everything I am  
Everything I want to be  
I can see what's mine now  
Finding out what's true  
Since I found you  
Looking through the eyes of ...<sup>44</sup>

I believe that this song fittingly describes Ton's passion and intense feeling for the "Other." I can say that his thoughts and intense feelings have always been focused on them. He wants to dwell on them. He wants the advocacy to remain. It is everything for him, everything he wants to happen since he found them. This is why, instead of "looking through the eyes of love," I titled this paper "Looking through the Eyes of the Poor and in Solidarity with Them" so as to account for Ton's love and passion for them. I also thank you very much, Ton, for the opportunity of knowing you a little deeper and for your meaningful contributions to the Church, to theology, and to society at large.

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<sup>44</sup><https://www.google.com.ph/search?q=lyrics+looking+through+the+eyes+of+love&oq=lyrics+lookingh+through+the&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.17135j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> (accessed September 23, 2017).