

**IMMERSED IN “WORDS”, IMMERSED WITH PEOPLE:
CONTRIBUTION OF MANNY GINETE, C.M.
TO THE LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHURCH**

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This paper sketches the “contributions” (read as gifts) of a theologian to the Church. It is a glimpse on the multiple dimensions on the life and contribution of Fr. Manny Ginete, CM (1948-present). The paper puts forward the perspective that a theologian is significant in many ways. There is no single form of how a theologian desires to contribute to the Church. As one reflects on the biography of a theologian (past and present), there is pervasive “pattern” of lifestyle that seems to illustrate a dynamism of immersing oneself into “words” and to the people. The depth of theologian’s life immersed in “words” (scholarship, etc.) is verified in the depth of engagement with the people. This dynamism appears to be a brilliant contribution of Ginete as a Filipino theologian. He is well-versed on both dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

A theologian is a gift to the Church. Whatever he does stand as his offering to the Church. The task then of this paper is to briefly re-present the contributions, or perhaps better, the gifts a theologian offers to the Church. I will pay attention on the gifts Fr. Manny Ginete, CM, offers to the Church. The gifts that a theologian offers to the Church can be seen in many aspects of his life. Having said this, it is relevant to go through the varieties of engagement of a theologian beginning from his formative years up to the pinnacle of his journey in life.

LIFE IN FORMATION

Manny Ginete was born on October 18, 1948 in Bulan, Sorsogon. He is one of the children of Manuel G. Ginete Sr. and

Maria Futralan. He is known as an outstanding student since the time he began elementary education. At an early age, according to one of his contemporaries in the seminary, Ginete was already “steeped in Catholic and intellectual culture,” with strong interest in books, highly organized, yet also a good companion, gaining friends of diverse interests and affiliations.

For his secondary education, Ginete studied at Colegio de la Immaculada Concepcion in Bulan, Sorsogon, under the direction of the Daughters of Charity. In this school, Ginete was known for his academic excellence. In many instances he was chosen to represent his school in academic competitions and he had proven himself superior in knowledge and wit. While in high school, he dreamed of becoming a religious priest. Thus, after his graduation in 1964, Ginete entered the St. Vincent Seminary (Valenzuela City, Bulacan). Two years later, he joined the Internal Seminary (Novitiate) in Angono, Rizal and became an admitted member of the Congregation of the Mission. In 1968 Ginete was sent to the United States, where he finished his degree in philosophy at St. Mary’s Seminary College in Missouri. Then, he pursued another four years to study theology at De Andreis Seminary (Lemont, IL, USA). Concurrently, he gained a master’s degree in theology at the De Paul University in Chicago. Hereafter, he was ordained as priest in 1976 by John Cardinal Cody at the Archdiocese of Chicago.

LIFE OF SERVICE IN THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL CHURCH

After his ordination, Ginete was assigned as the Director of the Vincentian Formation House in Angono, Rizal until 1980. From there, he was chosen to go for further studies at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) where he spent another four more years pursuing his doctoral in religious studies (1980-1984). After the completion of his doctoral studies he was assigned in Cebu and a year later he was appointed as Rector of Seminario Major San Carlos in Cebu City. As Ginete looked back, he would see his term in this seminary as one of his significant and most productive years.

During his stint as Rector of the seminary, he was involved as well on the many important concerns of the Archdiocese of Cebu. He became the Chair of the Commission on Worship and later on the Commission on Seminaries. He was also a member of the panel of theologians that provided advice to former Archbishop of Cebu, Ricardo Cardinal Vidal. In 1985-1986, he was part of the preparatory committee for the Fourth Diocesan Synod of Cebu and served in the Synodal Commission on Worship. In 1991, he represented the seminary to the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines. In addition, as the Archdiocese of Cebu committed on building of Basic Ecclesial Communities as its pastoral agenda, Ginete joined the work force in promoting it. Together with other committed people on this pastoral thrust, they labored so well as they moved around the different communities in facilitating workshops and building-up the organization of people.

Besides his many concerns, Ginete managed well to teach at the Graduate School of the University of San Carlos. Then, he was also invited to teach for two summers at the De La Salle University in Manila. Aside from these teaching engagements, he was also a member of the faculty for the Master of Arts in Religious Education organized by the Daughters of Charity in Paranaque City.

There were many other things that gave him a meaningful experience as Rector of the seminary. One of those was the support of Cardinal Vidal to the programs and other undertakings of the seminary. And because of that, the seminary would average between 90 to 100 seminarians every year during his term. Every year, the seminary had 20 to 30 candidates for ordination to the priesthood.

Ginete would claim that part of the excellent formation program of the seminary was the involvement of the lay as part of the formation team. This was a distinctive feature of the seminary that time. Together with the priest-formators, there were additional six lay formators that would help on the human formation of the seminarians. They had invaluable contribution on this aspect. To have a more balance perspective, the lay formators was also given the chance to equip themselves by learning theology.

As head of the formation team of the seminary, Ginete would ensure that everybody gets involved in the different ministries. The active participation of everyone in the different ministries facilitate a meaningful journey of the seminarians. This dynamism in the seminary became a beautiful experience for everyone. Because of this, Ginete would say that they hardly had problems on the discipline of the seminarians. They had excellent and well-motivated students.

From here on, Ginete moved forward to another major responsibility. He was elected as the Provincial Visitor of the Congregation of the Mission (henceforth, Vincentians) in 1998. During his term as Provincial, he led the Vincentians into achieving significant goals. He initiated the construction of the Santuario de San Vicente de Paul. It was a millennium project, and now standing as one of the major landmarks in Quezon City.

A significant revitalization of the St. Vincent School of Theology (SVST) was also among the many concerns of Ginete. He encouraged and led the Vincentians in transforming SVST into something unique as compared to other theological schools. With the cooperation of Vincentian confreres, the idea of theology from the margins as the animating vision of SVST was put forward. This animating vision was given a big push when Danny Pilario, CM finished his doctorate at the Catholic University of Louvain in 2002. Together with other committed Vincentians, they carried out the “rebirth” of SVST.

Ginete took part in the early formation of the *Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya* (DAKATEO), the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines. It was conceived as organization of theologians that provides space for theological reflection and writing, that fosters fellowship among its members and solidarity with the poor and that also serves as a resource to the Philippines’ church. DAKATEO was realized and Ginete became its chairperson in 2002.¹ But he had to relinquish it later to address a medical condition. DAKATEO now has 51 members. It holds annual

¹ See Dennis Gonzalez, ed., *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church* (Manila: De La Salle University, 2004), xi.

academic conferences and co-publishes a journal with SVST almost every year.

His term as Provincial ended in 2004. From here on, he had to assume another leadership responsibility at the General Curia of the Vincentians in Rome. He was appointed as the Delegate of the Superior General to the Vincentian Family worldwide. This responsibility would require him to represent the Superior General ensuring that the charism of St. Vincent de Paul would remain in life and mission of Vincentian organizations. So, from one place to the other, Ginete had to visit a Vincentian community.² Most of his time was occupied in giving conferences to the Vincentian family in different countries. He had to travel frequently around Europe, Asia, Latin America, USA, and Africa.

Ginete ended his responsibility in Rome in 2011. He moved on to a new engagement in a new territory—South Sudan. He volunteered to join a group called Solidarity with South Sudan. The group is sponsored by the Union of Superiors General in Rome. His time in South Sudan was another episode of sharing himself with the people. Most of his time was spent in giving conferences to the lay, religious and clergy. But above all that, he must live a life with a diverse culture comprising the Solidarity with South Sudan. He was surrounded with highly competent professionals who were ready and determined to pour out themselves beyond their respective borders. As he journeyed with them, Ginete realized that he belonged to an enriching group, apart from the wealth of good memories he had with the local people in South Sudan. This enriching experience in the mission lasted seven years until January 2019.

Ginete is home now from the mission. He is appointed as the Rector of SVST and is currently teaching several courses such as Sacrament of Healing, Christology and Theology of Ministry. As the Rector of SVST he functions as the head of the Administrative Council that serves as the decision-making body of the institution.

² Most of these conferences were published locally, in countries where they were held, and for different branches of the worldwide Vincentian Family. Some of intercontinental interests were in the official Vincentian publication, *Vincentiana*.

FRUITS OF DEEP THINKING

Apart from the extensive engagement of Ginete on leadership responsibilities, mission, and on-going formation/education, his rigors and clarity of thinking is significant to be revisited. In 1984, Ginete defended his dissertation to the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Louvain. The dissertation was entitled *From Translation to Creation Via Adaptation: A Study on Liturgical Language in Holy See Documents (1947-1983)*.³ The dissertation was about liturgical language. Basically, it was a dissertation on Vatican II, focused on the change of liturgical language from Latin to vernacular. Before and after Vatican II, this was, according to Ginete, “the most overarching debate.” The liturgical reform was stalled at this point. Ginete perceived that behind the struggle on liturgical language was also the struggle on the actual reforms in the Church advanced in Vatican II.

The basic insights highlighted in the dissertation are: 1. The liturgical language captures the opposing tensions on Church renewal put forward in Vatican II; 2. The Church was moving gradually into being inclusive of the local/vernacular language in liturgy; 3. There was a growing usefulness of using the local language in liturgy, but it was resisted by the traditionalists identified with the Latin liturgy. The traditionalists who opposed the introduction of vernacular in the liturgy were the same people who opposed the reforms put forward by Vatican II; 4. Liturgy should not stop in translation and adaptation. There is a necessity to create one; 5. To say that we create new liturgy is consistent with what the Church has done in the past, and its direction to the future; 6. The *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is clear in providing more power to the Conference of Bishops to decide on liturgy for the local Church; and 7. If there is no reform in the liturgy, we cannot think of reform in the Church.

³ Manuel F. Ginete Jr., “From Translation to Creation Via Adaptation: A Study on Liturgical Language in Holy See Documents (1947-1983)” unpublished Doctoral Diss. (Faculty of Theology, Catholic University Leuven, 1984).

Looking at liturgical renewal today, Ginete observed that we moved slowly during the time of Benedict XVI. This time with Francis, it appears that we are moving forward but he adds, a lot of things still need to be done. The ultimate one to be concerned about is the creation of our own inculturated liturgy. But this is not happening yet. He points out the fact that the Church authorities in Rome do not think the way we think of our local Church. Skepticism seems to prevail among the Church authorities when it comes to liturgical inculturation.

Ginete perceived that theologians in the Philippines are also divided on matters about liturgical reform. One camp is identified with the advocacy of Anscar Chupungco, OSB. This one is for real reform. The second camp is the more conservative, following Benedict XVI. With Francis now, Ginete claimed, theologians advocating liturgical reform feel more empowered in a way. He said, "I think, Francis is just waiting for the right time for the English translation of the liturgy to be changed. That is my feeling. But in terms of an inculturated liturgy, it will take more time because the bishops are still not one on this matter." The liturgical reform, as observed by Ginete, is only a microcosm of the bigger reform needed in the Church. This problem has a great deal to do with the question of the relationship between the universal Church and the local Church.

Liturgical renewal is imperative in Asia. But again, for it to have a chance, the right leaders are needed. In retrospect, Ginete observed, the ones who advocated inculturation in Vatican II were missionary bishops. This was so because they were the ones who were immersed in their respective local Churches.

Asked about his view on the role of theologians in society, Ginete elaborated that theologians have an important role not only in society, but also in relation to the bishops. Theologians, for him, should serve the Church; this is not simply a matter of obeying the bishops. Theologians need to point out possibilities, should see the bigger context for the local Church. For instance, DAKATEO, could lend its service to the CBCP in helping articulate teaching and instructions. This does not mean imposing ideas on the Bishops, but rather working closely with them as "reflectors" of an on-going experience of being the local church. Much remains to be

done in this area. But certainly, a constructive relationship between bishops and theologians would be most helpful.

Ginete’s intellectual creativity goes beyond the production of his “monumental” dissertation in 1984. He took on some administrative responsibilities and acted as resource person to various groups on different occasions. Out of his engagement in the continuing formation of the clergy, religious, and lay people, Ginete produced a good number of scholarly articles from the early 1990s up to the present. Out of this collection, I reviewed some that illustrate his clear thinking and deep thoughts.

His *Theology of Peace* (1995) is a talk delivered before a group of Church workers in Cebu City.⁴ The paper expounds on a theological perspective on peace. It defines peace as relational (a product of the quality of human relations), as social (unity in diversity, equality in dignity), as dialogical (a result of constant dialogue), as communion (part of our creative life together in harmony), as a process (peace is peace-making), as a gift (a God’s gift to humanity), and as a sign of radical discipleship. The paper concludes, “For peace to flower in our times, God has to reign again in our minds and hearts. This is so simple, and yet so radical.”

The link between liturgy and option for the poor was treated clearly in his *Liturgy and the Option for the Poor* (2003).⁵ This paper expounded on the following key themes: 1. Liturgy as *memoria* of God’s gift; 2. Liturgy as dangerous *memoria* in the world and in the church; 3. Liturgy as *memoria* of a concrete existing community; and 4. Liturgy as “verified” in life. Ginete provided a clear summary of each theme.

Option for the poor as God’s option. Before dealing with each theme, Ginete asserted that the option for the poor is as old as the scripture itself. Beyond this, the option for the poor is, from the beginning and until today, an option of God himself. Ginete commented, “Aside from reminding us that “the poor will always be with us,” the scripture tells that the firs and fundamentally, the

⁴ Delivered in February 1994 to a group of C-CIMPEL Volunteers, the Archdiocesan arm for Political Education and Empowerment.

⁵ This conference was eventually published by Seminario Mayor de San Carlos, in their publication, *Talad*, in 2004.

option for the poor was the very option that God made when faced with a people aspiring for liberation in a foreign land, when confronted with his beloved people weighed down by their own impertinence, hardheartedness, and especially when not enough prophets could convince his people to turn away from sin and faithlessness, such that he had to send even his son to be immersed in the poverty of humanity.”

Liturgy as memoria of God's option for the poor. Liturgy, Ginete asserted, is a *memoria* of God's option for the poor. He elaborates: “It is His option for the poor that lies at the heart of the self-offering that Jesus makes to his Father on the cross, as well as of the Father's act in raising Jesus from the dead. In other words, the liturgy is indeed the recalling (*memoria*) of all that God has done for us.”

Liturgy as God's gift. The liturgy brings us the memory that God's option for us is a present, a gift. God gave it as a gift to us even if we do not deserve it. This demonstrates the overflowing love of God to humanity. This resonates also the idea of gratuitousness of God. God look at us with overflowing love regardless of the question of worthiness. This is always presented to us in every participation on the liturgy.

Liturgy as dangerous memory to the Church and to the world. The liturgy, Ginete claimed, effects in us a liberating force to go beyond the negative realities that we confront in life. We want to be freed from any pain and suffering. In line with this, Ginete said, “The memory of suffering, oppression and struggle in order to obtain liberation make us look forward to a tomorrow that will be better than yesterday at the very least if not for us, for our children and grandchildren.”

Liturgy as a memory of a concrete existing community. As we are continuously reminded of the option of God to the poor, the Church must respond to it by taking the poor as its responsibility. Ginete said, “The community that gathers and celebrates is not some archaic groups of disciples but a living, a vibrant community of men and women, drawn together by the utter graciousness of a God who allowed his son to become the offering for their sins.”

Liturgy as “verified” in life. For Ginete, liturgy is made concrete in life. Liturgy is never dissociated from life. He said,

“Most important of all, the liturgy in which the community of disciples and believers gather does not stand on its own. It is always connected to the real situation in life.”

Ginete’s thoughts were also part of the ongoing formation of the bishops in South Sudan. Before a group of Bishops in South Sudan, Ginete was asked to offer a theological reflection on the pastoral role of a Bishop using the three *munera* as theological frame. In *Shepherds After My Heart, Reflections on the Bishop’s Pastoral Role in South Sudan*,⁶ he described and synthesized the pastoral role of a bishop this way: “In other words, nothing that is human and affects human persons can be outside the concern and solicitude of the Church and her pastors.”

On different occasions and locations, Ginete had journeyed with the clergy and lay people. Before a group of priests and lay people in Rome, Italy, he offered a deep reflection on the Filipino Migrant Ministry. In the *International Year of the Priests: Perspectives for Filipino Ministry in Italy Today (2009)*,⁷ Ginete discussed that ministry to the migrants must take into consideration the following directions: 1. Towards a sacramental community; 2. Towards a prophetic community; 3. Towards a serving community, and 4. Towards an empowered community. At the concluding part of the discussion, he offered the following encouragement to Filipino priests and lay people. He said, “As we minister to our Filipino communities, it is my hope that we share with them the love that God so overwhelmingly showered upon us, his assistants in the ministry. With it, they will be enabled to show how they could become the sacramental, prophetic, and serving community.”

As a Vincentian immersed with the realities of people in South Sudan, Ginete brought an enlightening reflection on the prophetic character of religious life. In *Prophets in Solidarity with God’s People/Family in South Sudan (2011)*,⁸ Ginete presented the

⁶ Given in Juba, South Sudan on November 13, 2013.

⁷ This talk was given at the Colegio Filipino in Rome, in June 27, 2009.

⁸ This conference was delivered in October 2011 at the Symposium, One Nation from Every Tribe, Land and People, held in Juba, South Sudan. Eventually was published as part of the proceedings of the Symposium, edited by John Ashworth.

prophetic character of religious life as a theological framework of the Solidarity with South Sudan (SSS), a team of missionaries volunteered to work with the local churches in South Sudan. He mentioned that the prophetic character of religious life is evidenced and carried out in the mission or ministry, organization, and community life of SSS. For him, it is important to understand prophecy as proclaiming and witnessing the Good News received from Jesus. It is also countercultural. And above all, it is the participation in the Office of Christ as prophet.

Ginete asserted further that religious life must maintain its focus on the twin passion for Christ, and passion for humanity. This must be always the fundamental framework that animates religious life. He concluded as he said, “Imbued with this double passion, the Solidarity of South Sudan members as prophets in solidarity with the God’s people and family in South Sudan, attempt to listen to God, read the signs of the times, and act with resoluteness—all in order to bring about the Reign of God in our midst.” Indeed, this paper is a worthy contribution in deepening a theological understanding of religious life in the context of mission.

Ginete’s theological expertise also served well his fellow Vincentians. In rare occasion of the gathering of Vincentian formators in Asia-Pacific, Ginete expounded on priests as servant-leaders (*Priests as Servant Leaders with Others: Reflections from St. Vincent’s Perspective*, 2004).⁹ As he encouraged fellow Vincentians, he said: “A good priest can be an enormous blessing to the people and the Church. A priest with a good attitude will put the people’s needs uppermost in his list of priorities. Educated and committed clergy meant not only a robust Christian people, able to understand and receive the sacraments with faith, but also a happy group of Church ministers.” And from here, Ginete laid down important

⁹ Delivered at the Asia-Pacific CM Formators’ Conference in Tagaytay City, Philippines, on August 17, 2004. Another conference was given at the joint meeting of the Asia-Pacific CM Formators and the Charism and Culture Commission of the Asia-Pacific Visitors’ Conference, in Mysore, India, on February 13-25, 2006. It was eventually published in the book, Armada Riyanto, ed., *Formation for Mission: In Search of Contextualization of Vincentian Formation and Charism in Asia Pacific*, (Malang, Indonesia: Vincentian CCC of Asia Pacific and Widya Sasana Publication, 2006), 19-56.

elements on the practice of a priest as servant-leader: 1. Seeks continuously the will of God; 2. Prioritizes the poor; 3. Listens to the people entrusted to his care and to their needs, feels with them, offers his life for them; 4. Teaches the people about the Good News of God’s love for them; 5. Seeks the poor’s liberation and commits to their empowerment; 6. Learns from the poor, open and willing to be “evangelized”; 7. Marshals all energies for this “Mission”, engages others in its accomplishment, establishes concrete ways and structures to bring about the Kingdom of God in the lives of the poor; and 8. A servant-leader is indefatigable.

CONCLUSION

The brief sketch of Ginete’s life and journey reveals the two poles on the life of a theologian—immersion with words (life of disciplined study), and immersion to people (life of service to the Church). These two poles must always interpenetrate each other. When these two poles become mutually exclusive, there is a danger of an academic life that is detached from the realities of people. The other extreme is equally possible. When immersion to people is not balanced with one’s immersion to words, there is also a danger of activism without depth. Hence, a theologian who could manage to strike the balance of the two poles becomes outstanding in his expertise and credibility.

It is important that a theologian maintains a discipline of immersing himself/herself into a conversation with fellow thinkers. This can be done in the solemnity of his study space. But the theologian needs to rise-up from his study. He must communicate to the people the fruits of his study. He must converse with the people. He must allow diverse voices from the ground to challenge his views and convictions. And this must lead him back to the solemnity of his study for continuing reflection.

Ginete’s life as a theologian is “patterned” according to the dynamism between a life immersed in “words,” and a life that is immersed with people. This appears as a constant feature in the major episodes of his life as accounted above. This is indeed a life that is truly a gift offered to the Church.

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