

# WHAT IS THEOLOGY FOR ME, ITS HOW AND WHEREFORE

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*This article focuses on a way of doing theology which interfaces with the science of evolutionary psychology. Faith seeks understanding or explanation. Augustine seeks to understand the Trinity through rational psychology; Aquinas explains "Creator" in the philosophical category of Aristotle's "Prime Mover." On the theology of original sin, this paper seeks explanation of "original sin" from the evolution of the brain. "Original blessing" precedes original sin in creation. Each step of the evolutionary process benefits the living organism, including humans, but when the "blessing" does not follow the priorities of the next evolution's level, it can destroy the organism. For example, sex is a beneficial instinct to perpetuate the species but, at times, it prevails destructively over individual's rational relationship with others; traditionally, we attribute the destructive result to "original sin." The mammalian mother-offspring bonding is an evolutionary improvement over reptilian non-relationship between the two, but, in some instances, a mammalian mother neglects the child. Again, we can attribute that neglect to original sin when, in fact, according to evolutionary integrity, the mother simply allows her reptilian indifference to prevail over the mammalian care. Original sin is not sin by itself but the pulling down by the function of the lower brain and the mismatch of our mental equipment attuned to surviving, adapting, and reproducing in a bygone era but inadequate in a fast paced present. Jesus' vision of a new inclusive world (kingdom of peace, justice, and love) transcends the limitations of each brain (territoriality, sex, ethics of survival). The name "God" is given to "Wisdom of Nature," or Greater Reality or Higher Purpose that we inevitably conceive in evolution. Understanding the faith from a scientific theory like evolution critiques a supernaturalistic and fatalistic religiosity; at the same time, the input of Christian revelation forestalls a purely reductionistic faith that gets stuck in the hormones!*

## INTRODUCTION

**W**riting about how I do theology in my respective contexts is both humbling and confidence-building. It is humbling because there are other local theologians who have already written and still write great theological stuff, better than I can. However, I

begin to build confidence in what I do for I am simply sharing personal narrative of **what** is theology for me and **how** I do it, no more no less. Acknowledging, beforehand, my fallibility and accepting my initial bias for certain ideas in the subject liberates me from presumptuous and pretentious claims. Any claim of contribution that my theology brings to society in general will be no more no less than what I give. In the final analysis, what my readers do with what they can possibly learn from how and **why** I do theology, I might never know.

### **THEOLOGY FOR ME**

Theology for me is the task of retelling a story in a new context and in a language adaptable to changing social circumstances. So, theology for a beginning is engaged in divesting the story of mythical elements or mythological forms in order to uncover the meaning underlying them. Related to this is to look at theology as faith which, experienced through reading or hearing of the story, is seeking explanation. The word “explanation” etymologically comes from the Latin word, *explanare*, that is, to make level. Myths are seen to belong to another time and situated in faraway places so that they need to be brought to the familiar grounds of the new “audience” with its current context and social circumstances.

Thus, theologizing is an act of seeing beyond the myth, the metaphors, and other literary genres, in their own peculiar life-settings, with the intention of giving them new relevant meanings for contemporary believers. This tedious task of unwrapping and unmasking hidden meanings liberates us from literalism and fundamentalism, the context of so many extremist acts of fanaticism. To engage in theology, then, is to engage in an act of freeing ourselves even from the esoteric knowledge of the sacred. “Making level” in the act of explaining brings to consciousness the descent of the divine to the human, affirming the incarnational aspect of faith (“Word became flesh” John 1:14), and its perfective role in spiritual life (“Be perfect as the Father is perfect” Matthew 5:48). Theology, ironically, humanizes because it is the study of the humanity of God and it politicizes because it is always

contextualized in the *polis*.

An image of a theologian then is John the Baptizer, the leveler of the road to an encounter with Christ. Like the Precursor, the theologian puts the searchers on the way to the Lord and, then, gets out of the way after leading them to an encounter with Him. The theologian, too, is the Samaritan woman at the well who became a link between Jesus and her co-villagers when her personal and transformative encounter with the Lord enabled her to be that link, explaining to them who He is. We learn that she also got out of the way as signified by what she was told by those she led to the Lord: “We no longer believe just because of your words; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world” (John 4:42). Both the baptizer and the water fetcher explained who Jesus is by retelling his story: “This Jesus who you know is a carpenter’s son in Nazareth and a stranger who wanders in Samaria is actually the Prophet and Messiah long awaited by your forefathers!”

In the task of retelling a story by interpreting and explaining, I am reminded of the task of pre-Christian shamans who brought to middle earth the wisdom they had gathered in their journey through the realm above the earth.<sup>1</sup> They were the memory of their people who would ask them to mediate healing not only for the sickness of individuals but also for the ills of society and of nature as well. A theology, that is faithful to the memory of the people it belongs to and can retell it in their context and new social circumstances, can mediate healing and wellness to their world, which at times is uprooted and trapped within. Being forgetful of the past and unresponsive to the future is a formula of extinction. A good shaman is one who exercises *anamnesis* and has vision of the *telos* (purposive end); in this regard, theology is a shamanic act, remembering and projecting.

Theology is an act of adventure. We cannot change the texts of the Scriptures, neither can we re-write Church’s doctrines,

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on shamanism and its correlation with the Christian ministry, see my book, *Release for Wholeness. A Study of Healing Where Faith and Science Converge and Grace in Nature Revealed* (Roxas, Capiz: St. Anthony College of Roxas City, Inc., 2015).

unless you belong to the Magisterium. Theologians are privileged in a way; they are not constrained by the unalterable texts but they can modify, embellish, and diminish their significance depending on the context and social circumstances. Theology is like a relaxed and pleasurable walk in the garden enjoying the scenery and picking up plants and flowers that fancy the wanderer. In front of the theologian's eyes of faith lies the wealth of the Church's wisdom through the ages, the infinite diversity of thoughts of the Church's great thinkers and workers. And now, too, the wealth of the natural and social sciences have spilled over into the theologian's domain so that the sacred and the secular thoughts are bound to meet and congeal for better or for worse. In any mode, theology is never the same again.

Theology ultimately is a cause for humility, for one is confronted with so great a Mystery that any attempt to explain *It* seems so insolent. As we demonstrated above, after performing their function of "explaining" the Lord to the curious crowd, both John the Baptizer and the Samaritan woman stood aside to allow the new believers to experience their own awe of the newly discovered Messiah. Thomas Aquinas, the foremost explainer of the faith in the Catholic Church had a similar humbling experience in his life as a theologian. At a certain point in his life, he seemed to have lost his passion for theology after a revelation while celebrating Mass. A confrere of his who was also his secretary and friend pleaded with him to resume his writing and finish his *Summa*. To that person he replied: "The end of my labors has come. All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me."<sup>2</sup>

Below is my response to "How I do theology"? I would suppose at the end, my response will get the fate of Thomas' "straw," that is, it will be worth burning. Straw or not, it will be my modest share of this theological exercise. Earlier, I pointed at John the Baptizer and the Samaritan Woman as two self-effacing "theologians." Henceforth, I commit myself, too, to a self-effacing

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<sup>2</sup> Dan Graves, "I Can Write No More," *In Context. The Stories behind Memorable Sayings in Church History*, accessed from [www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/Aquinas](http://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/Aquinas).

theology, a theology that can be discarded when it has outlived its purpose. Meanwhile, I humbly offer to share how I do theology.

## HOW I DO THEOLOGY?

### ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

In the Lord's Prayer Christians still address God as the Father in heaven and pray that "His will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is the task of the shaman, and the theologian's as well, to make known on earth what is going on in heaven, that is, humans eventually should see it God's way. In the Christian faith, there is only one God, but God's activities are so infinitely vast that we would not know where to start reflecting. There are many theological areas, given the infinite nature of God. It will be an idolatrous act to attempt to capture God in one system of knowledge. The essence or nature of God is mysterious as it is elusive. There is the area of studies on the *Triune God*, an area on *Creation*, on *Christology and Soteriology*, or on the *Four Last Things*. I am going to illustrate my theologizing in the area of *Christian Anthropology*, which used to be called *Sin and Grace*. I shall narrow this area to focus myself not just on sin, in general, but on one aspect of it: **original sin**. The purpose of this paper is to share my way of doing theology, which begins with our communal faith, seeking explanation.

Before presenting my preferred way of seeking explanation, I shall briefly sum up three more common approaches both in the past and in the present: mythical or narrative, philosophical or scholastic, and sociological or liberational. Great things have been written in theology, based on these approaches, and there will be more. But I have opted to take off from another discipline: science or, to be more specific, evolutionary psychology. Personally, I see the limitation of this approach, but so are the others. But, if theology has at its sight not only the perfect God but also the perfectible people, then, it has as its concern the human flourishing. In this area, natural science is an indispensable factor, either as a tool or as a system.

In theology as faith seeking explanation, it is inevitable to be doing theology; after all, faith is response-able and, therefore,

responsible. In our scientific world, our common knowledge of evolution connotes natural selection which is another way of saying indirectly that the organism adapts to the environment. In humans, this adaptation can take the form of shaping the environment purposively, thus, we have culture in addition to nature. Understandably so, evolution is no longer limited to genetic or biological evolution; it goes all the way to cultural evolution and even spiritual evolution. In these outcomes humans do not just have to wait passively to evolve but can even steer evolution to forms in accordance with goals known through reason and inspired by Scriptures and tradition. For Christian believers, of course, a goal to get at can be an inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, theologizing is hardly a neutral or value-free activity, since it takes off from a faith experience. The activity is already biased from the beginning for the practical implications of the faith. The act of discernment is no longer to decide for God or not, but what to do in one's decision that has already been locked in with the perceived will of God. That is why we would rather use the phrase "doing theology" in order to bring home the idea that theology is more of a verb than a noun, more of a process than an outcome, and with the avowed bias for the wellbeing of humans under God's providence.

**FAITH SEEKS EXPLANATION ON SIN:  
AN EXAMPLE OF DOING THEOLOGY**

Paul experienced a dimension of sin which for him was enigmatic and inexplicable. He expressed with poignancy that conundrum in his letter to the Romans.

For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if [I] do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So, then, I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (*Romans 7:19-25*)

It is an appropriate and universal portrayal of what a person goes through in a sinful situation deep inside one's psyche. People of ancient times were baffled by the mystery of a deep-seated disharmony and they were looking for explanation. Humans, like in the past, are always in search for an understanding not just of everyday things but of matters that are transcendent, that is, lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience. The ancient search for explanation was mostly through mythmaking or storytelling. The storyteller of Genesis tried to explain the primordial experience of sin through the *Myth or Story of the Fall*. We can imagine that had Paul consulted a contemporary teacher of the Scriptures regarding his crisis, he was most likely to hear the narration of the Story of the Fall.

But what is myth and what does it do? A myth is usually thought of as a "traditional story", that is, a narrative that has been transmitted from generation to generation since time immemorial. No one can pinpoint the specific authors of an original myth. As a matter of fact, primitive myths were handed down in oral recitation of songs, proverbs, and verses which eventually, in much later time, put in written form after the invention of writing. I am reminded by our grandmother who orally narrated stories for us, her pre-school grandchildren, so we could be lulled to sleep. Robert Ellwood, a prolific writer on religion, makes this observation of a myth:

The special significance of a myth lies in the way such a traditional story represents in narrative form the basic worldview of a society, as we saw in regard to those primal oral tellings and retellings. It encodes in story the fundamental principles: its social organizations and way of life; its essential rituals, taboos, and other institutions; its dreams and its fears.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Ellwood, *Myth: Key Concepts in Religion* (NY, NY: Continuum, 2008), 8.

It is commonly observed in myths, especially in Creation Story, that a Creator (called “God” in the Judaeo-Christian tradition) is part of the explanation of the mysteries around us. Myths that tell a story about a hero or the origin of a locality, like an island or a lake, are oftentimes called legends (*alamat*, in Tagalog). In the Philippine context, we can think of a few like *Bernardo Carpio*, *Maria Makiling*, and the couple, *Malakas* and *Maganda*. Ellwood continues: “That the world of beginnings is told in story form, as a starting point, for our lives are stories, not just abstractions or allegories of something else. We need, therefore, a larger story of the universe into which our own petite story can be slipped.”<sup>4</sup> That is one way of saying that our life stories are meaningful only because they are contained in greater stories, which serve as overarching systems.

Stories are all the same in that they represent long-tested universal values like love, compassion, harmony, peace, justice, etc. The reason, perhaps, why our grandmother’s bedtime story lulled us to sleep was that in the myths on deities and legends of heroes, at the end, the good always triumph; justice is vindicated; and the wrong is punished. On a world that is often filled with senseless crimes and calamities, the story bestows order and meaning. The explanation given to the existence of sin and grace, through a story, calms pointless anxieties and provides relief from unnecessary guilt.

So far we have been interchanging the concept of myth and story. Some will object to that interchange; their objection might be due to their consideration of myth as false or fictitious. A story, on the other hand, might be a fiction, too, but it can be a narrative of what has actually happened or is happening. But, in this paper, myth or story is meant to express a popular belief, or notion that has developed around something or someone; or it can be a worldview of a people or an explanation of a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon. But like a story in literature, attention is not so much on whether the content has actually happened or not as what is the “lesson” or “message” it brings for humans and the world. From here on, this concept will be conveyed by the term, **story**.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

## RETELLING THE STORY OF SIN AND FALL

The Church through the centuries in its catechism and liturgical celebrations never cease to recount the story of the Fall as the one that started the universal experience of sin. Once upon a time, according to the story, Adam and Eve, first parents of the human race, turned away from God by disobeying a command that they should not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But, they did out of pride and so they were punished (Genesis 3:1-5). Almost immediately in the story, Cain killed his brother, Abel, out of envy (Genesis 4:8). Still in Genesis story, sin, the result of the Fall, cascaded through the ages as in the Tower of Babel and culminated in the sins at Noah's time drawing on God's anger and bringing on the Great Flood.

That is the story of the Fall, an attempt to explain a mysterious dimension of life called sin. The story satisfies not only the "curiosity" on what happened in the past but also suggests a way of life for the future. Being able to explain a problem or a mystery, you feel a little confident in handling it and even directing it for a God-inspired purpose.

The Church Fathers, like Ireneus and Augustine, named Paul's experience of sin as "original sin" for it has its origin in the Fall. The Church through its catechism continues the story:

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam 'as one body of one man'. By this 'unity of the human race' all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice.

And that is why original sin is called 'sin' only in an analogical sense: it is a sin 'contracted' and not 'committed' - a state and not an act.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the Church Fathers and the Magisterium simply continued the story as explanation of the mystery of sin in the human experience. In seeking for an explanation, we can use the categories of philosophy. Then, we would be saying, like the natural-law philosophers, that sin is a morally bad act which violates the natural order of reason. You notice that in this concept of sin, there is even no need for God's role in the system. Scholastic philosophy's explanation would also accept that part which mentions the violation of the order of nature and reason, but then it would add that natural law is derived from divine law.<sup>6</sup> The latter's reasoning mixes both story (the mythical or narrative) and philosophy.

In seeking explanation for the mystery of sin as narrated in the story, we could easily use the categories of liberation theology.<sup>7</sup> We would not be looking for the source of sin as much as we would for its effects: poverty, oppression, injustice. Instead of philosophy, here sociology is the discipline that provides the methods and categories of explaining why sin has created unjust structures and systems that perpetuate those dire conditions. On this nuance, we will be echoing the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* in its naming of original sin as "sin of the world" or the "polluted atmosphere" into which we are all born.<sup>8</sup> It continues: "It is the *social dimension* of original sin: the 'sinful structures' of injustice, oppression and exploitation that *PCPII (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines)* so emphasizes today in its thrust for social renewal and transformation."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican, 2005), no. 404, accessed July 29, 2016, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 1954-1955.

<sup>7</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *Evolution and Guilt* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Episcopal Commission on Catechism and Catholic Education, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: CBCP, 2005), par. 377.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

There is no doubt that philosophy and sociology provide good categories and models in providing explanation for the mystery of sin. Philosophical categories, however, like nature, essence, being, etc., are really too abstract and even irrelevant for our modern readers. Liberation theology has aptly used sociological categories like social structures, social constructs, oppressive systems, etc., which have made the method too predictable. Its methodological arm, “see-judge-act”, has been overused by theology students, thus making social issues trite and less contributive to new knowledge. This is not to question the valuable contribution of sociology to theology; only that there is a need to look for uncharted areas. In a rather congested territory of philosophical and sociologist theologians, we venture forth to theologize in an area not so frequently trodden by traditional theologians: the world of science. It is like being the primordial fish, that, sensing the congestion and competition in the sea, ventured forth to dry land in order to survive (evolving into reptiles and, later, into mammals including you and me!) and survive it did, and the rest is history in the evolutionary world.

### **A NEW CLIMATE WHERE SCIENCE AND FAITH INTERACT HARMONIOUSLY**

Philosophy, especially scholasticism, has in distant past almost monopolized explaining the faith to the point that it was called the “handmaid” of theology. In our time, sociology through liberation theology did the same for the categories of faith. Of course, long before them, in biblical times, their explanation was in the stories known in their oral tradition until one creative and enterprising person wrote them. Like women who liberated themselves, so handmaids, including theology’s handmaid, Philosophy, got liberated, too; and theology has been looking for alternatives.

In a way, stories still provide the structures and models of explaining daily revelations of God’s providential care and enduring values. Once in a while, stories of legendary beings like the Titans, gods and goddesses of the Greek mythology, surface in the world of movies; so are the remake of Batman and Superman.

They never cease to impress us. Obviously, Filipino audience would rather watch stories these days in the *teleserye* (TV series), see movies, and read pocketbooks of matters of the heart of people we can identify with in our time and in our place. Clearly, they try to explain some mysteries about love and suffering in relationships, besides providing entertainment. But narratives of science frequently appear in the world of media, science fictions abound; they do not only entertain, they also project possibilities in the world, enriching relationships, shaping the individuals and societies. Can science actually give explanation for the faith as philosophy and sociology have done? How can the spiritual realm of faith and religion be explained and understood through the discipline of science? How can the spiritual matters of faith be explained by empirical science?

The second part of this paper will be the illustration of faith-seeking explanation, neither through philosophy nor sociology, but through science. We will attempt to explain a faith experience by way of scientific narrations, that is, explaining “original sin” through the science of evolutionary psychology. But, before doing that just let us see how an atmosphere of familiarity and easy relationship have surfaced in both the religious and scientific worlds. Two phenomena that are unquestionably the foci of interaction are neuroscience and faith or miraculous healing.<sup>10</sup>

Miracles are traditionally believed to be interruptions of the law of nature through the intervention of God. For instance, a person is considered healed when all manifestations of his/her wellbeing are negative of any symptom after prayer sessions and the mediation of a healer. So, a religious event like healing is an object of faith and is being explained through another belief in God’s providence. That is fine and good in the traditional acceptance of healing as God’s direct intervention. But how about making science as the one that will explain what is known to be a miracle? The answer to this rhetorical question is in the affirmative. So many

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<sup>10</sup> Jaime Belita, *Release for Wholeness*, 201-215; 292; 295.

books have been written on the scientific grounding of healing.<sup>11</sup> To explain the scientific grounding of healing is not part of this paper, but here it is simply to make the readers aware that it is already done.

As far as methodology is concerned, there are already found examples of correlation of science and faith expression. One example is the scientific monitoring of a “spiritual happening,” like meditation through the study of the structure and function of the nervous system and the brain, through neurochemistry and experimental psychology, which are all contained in a branch of life sciences called neuroscience. In other words, it is possible to have empirical data within the human body of the so-called matters of the spirit. Neuroscience, like cultural anthropology, is a proof that science and religion interface, that is, they can meet and interact.<sup>12</sup> An example is that of meditation, a religious act, which, at its intensity, inhibits some higher neocortical brain centers identified with mundane cares. In the process, the one who meditates enters into a spiritual world, freed from the harmful distractions of the outside world. It is only logical that the outcome in the brain as brought about by meditation can also be brought about by physically tinkering with the neocortical brain centers. The statement of George Vaillant, a psychoanalyst and a research psychiatrist at Harvard University, is insightful: “Today we still are seeking the healing ingredients and proper dosages of religion. Science can help.”<sup>13</sup>

Still in the issue of meditation and our bodily condition, it will almost be impossible to determine which one is which in the cause-effect analysis. For example, at the height of meditation the meditator acquires normal blood pressure. Does it mean that

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<sup>11</sup> See, for examples, Frederic Flac, MD, *Faith, Healing and Miracles* (Long Island City, NY: Hatherleigh Press, 2000); Larry Dossey, MD, *The Extraordinary Healing Power of Ordinary Things* (NY: Harmony Books, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See, for examples, Dean Hamer, *The God Gene. How Faith Is Hardwired Into Our Genes* (NY: Anchor Books, 2005); Matthew Alper, *The “God” Part of the Brain. A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God* (Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2006).

<sup>13</sup> George Vaillant, *Spiritual Evolution: How We Are Wired for Faith, Hope, and Love* (NY, NY: Broadway Books, 2008), 191.

meditation causes peace of mind, thus effecting normal blood pressure; or meditation causes normal blood pressure, thus effecting peace of mind. All we know is that, barring other factors, they are always together and that would justify our saying that both (religious experience and bodily state) are correlated.

The correlation of faith and science depicted above in the area of neuroscience is a message that the two enjoy a **consonance**;<sup>14</sup> another phenomenon that indicates the same in healing. Healing is explained among believers as the result of God's direct intervention, but consonance is found in the scientific theory of quantum physics. It is not my intention to delineate in details the correlation of quantum physics and healing; it suffices to mention some of its aspects that would interface with healing.<sup>15</sup> Related to it is a datum which shows that in the split of an atom, the two parts although far apart are still aware of each other. And so, the so-called individual is not a solid object but more like a field, and individuals can affect one another through their fields (a possible explanation of distant healing?). Originating from quantum physics is quantum touch. Here, energy flows within our bodily system and can be transmitted through personal contact. Healing in this view is the "repair" activity of energy that flows from the healer to the healed, or simply the healer triggers the patient's body to heal itself. As the saying goes, "the body is its own best doctor." So, in the so-called miracle of healing, other than the traditional view of God's intervention in healing, is the explanation that within nature itself (in the bodies of the healer and the healed and their respective fields) healing is realized. Here, unlike the belief in God's intervention and suspension of the law of nature, God's providence is believed to be embedded in nature itself. In this regard, this healing can only be called miracle in its biblical meaning, that is, anything that is wonderful to behold (not necessarily a violation of nature's law).

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<sup>14</sup> Ted Peters, "Introduction," in *Science and Theology. A New Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 1-10; 1. It is a correspondence or connection between "understanding of nature discerned scientifically and understanding of the world as God's creation discerned theologically."

<sup>15</sup> J. Belita, *Release for Wholeness*, 103-106.

So, the so-called miracle does not need explanation by way of God's immediate intervention; it does not mean, though, that God has no more role to play. Any Catholic textbook on creation and providence would state the Thomistic dictum that in the universe God is the primary cause and nature is secondary. Related to this doctrine that has always been held by the Church are other maxims that indicate God's relationship with nature. Examples are: "Grace builds on nature," "Divine law is harnessed through natural law." Thus, nature and its workings reveal God and His providence. This brings us to an illustration of a faith experience explainable through a scientific narration within the human body.

### **CONSONANCE OF FAITH EXPERIENCE AND SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION**

Traditionally, sin has been considered a break in the relationship with God or violation of the divine laws. Lately, however, science is used here to explain it, as shown by a quick look at recent books: *The Science of Sin* (2012) by Simon Laham and the *Biology of Sin* (2010) by Matthew Stanford. There is no need to evaluate these works here; only that we need to show that a doctrine like sin can be explained by science. A window to a mutually beneficial interfacing of faith and science is what Peters calls, as mentioned above, "consonance" but adding "hypothetical" to make it "hypothetical consonance."<sup>16</sup> We really can't find a perfect accord, for, if there is, it is either distorted science or distorted faith or both. In conserving their difference, consonance would be a more realistic but a productive connection. Peter is optimistic in this regard:

If there is only one reality and if both science and theology speak about the same reality, is it reasonable to expect that sooner or later shared understandings will develop? Both science and theology pursue truth; and even though the methods differ, each of the two disciplines should

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<sup>16</sup> T. Peters, "Introduction", 1.

eventually be able to recognize some level of truth reported in the other.<sup>17</sup>

With the qualifier “hypothetical”, we are in a situation of making assertions about “God” which would be subjected to critical evaluation as we gain more data provided by the sciences. Scientific thinking, however, inevitably asks questions beyond the empirical and scientists reflect beyond their technological tools and ask questions of ultimacy that would certainly warrant philosophical answers. If there is philosophy, theodicy (which is philosophy of God) is not far behind. In such positing of the idea of God, we have the right to be optimistic in believing that we will enjoy just gazing at the God-created world we live in without having to analyze it.

However, not everybody chooses to be optimistic like the believers in a faith-science consonance in the future. Yet, in contrast to the stubborn stance of those “new atheists,”<sup>18</sup> modern science has developed theories that carry an aura of self-limitation. What comes to our mind especially is the principle of indeterminacy in quantum theory. Gone are the days when some scientists would easily adopt pure naturalism and empiricism. Science has accepted its incapacity to observe and measure accurately and objectively, because the observer and his/her instrument interfere in what is observed. It is difficult to imagine that the thought of the observer helps determine the outcome of the result but, believe it or not, it does in quantum physics!

The appellation “scientific theories” has equivalents in “scientific narrations,” “scientific constants” and “scientific stories.” Here, it might be more appropriate to use “scientific narrations;” it is less “dogmatic” than scientific theories. “Scientific stories” can easily be confused with science fiction stories. When both science and faith maintain their openness to future developments, going back to past hostilities is unlikely. Scientific narration by reason of new discoveries can and should be revised

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Besides R. Dawkins, and C. Hitchens to be cited below, the “new atheists” include Sam Harris , *The End of Faith, Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, (NY, NY: W.W. Norton, 2004) and Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as Natural Phenomenon* (U.S.A: Penguin Books, 2006).

and, therefore, be re-narrated, when the need arises, just as the explanation of faith be revised too as human experiences unfold to other forms.

**ORIGINAL SIN AND BRAIN EVOLUTION:  
ILLUSTRATION OF FAITH EXPLAINED  
THROUGH SCIENCE**

Paul has described an experience of sin, the origin of which Genesis had long before recounted in the story of the Fall. From the mythical story, sin is the ongoing effect of the Fall up to the present. The philosophical explanation is that it is nature going awry from reason and order in the world, a deviation from its *telos* or purpose. Sociologically, it is an oppressive structure or system that traps people within, making them perpetuate certain traditions and behaviors that build up those same unjust structures and systems at the expense of the powerless.

Now we come to the explanation of original sin through the scientific narration of “evolution,” evolutionary psychology, to be specific, with the concomitant development of the human brain. Some evolutionists, however, are not keen on including God in the scheme; in fact, the aggressively atheistic theorists of evolution like Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*, 2007) and Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great. How Religion Poisons Everything*, 2007) see this as the refutation of the creation doctrine and the proof-claim of blind evolution. However, not lacking are theistic evolutionists who believe that evolution and creation do not necessarily contradict each other.

An explanation of the faith experience of original sin is anchored on evolutionary psychology which develops in tandem with the evolution of the human brain. Unless we have an understanding of this evolutionary brain there is no use explaining original sin from a scientific narration. Rev. Michael Dowd, evolutionary evangelist and eco-theologian, says that scientific evidence is overwhelming in the phenomenon of the human brain as “an emergent phenomenon in which physical structures and neurological connections developed in an additive and exploratory way over millions of year.” According to him, “[i]t is now beyond dispute in the scientific community that our deepest and most basic

structures were shaped within the skulls of our reptilian ancestors who ate, survived, and reproduced in an era that long preceded the dinosaurs.”<sup>19</sup>

The description of the brain development is linked to the name of Paul MacLean, an American neuroscientist, who espoused the idea of the “Triune Brain,” in which are located the three main lobes. The theory views the three distinct lobes or brains as having emerged successively in the course of evolution correlating to the time sequence of the evolutionary emergence of the reptilian, paleo-mammalian, and neo-mammalian brains respectively; now, they inhabit the same human skull. This triune brain theory of MacLean has been improved upon by others, according to Dowd, who have recognized a fourth and more evolved mammalian brain structure, the prefrontal cortex or frontal lobe.<sup>20</sup>

Describing the functions of the four-structure brain will give us an idea and even appreciation of evolutionary psychology; only then, can original sin be explained according to a scientific narration. The **reptilian** brain, the oldest of the four, regulates the body's vital functions such as heart beat, breathing, and body temperature. Reptilian brain in us includes the brainstem and the cerebellum which takes care of safety, sustenance, and sex. From this brain are the attributes of aggressiveness and compulsiveness. The **limbic** brain emerged in the first mammals. It encodes memories of activities and behaviors that produced pleasant and unpleasant experiences, giving origin to human emotions. The main structures of the limbic brain are the hippocampus, the amygdala, and the hypothalamus, structures associated with specific functions. The limbic brain facilitates value judgments that are often made unconsciously exerting such a strong impact on our behavior. Social bonding, cooperative behavior, status seeking, to name a few, originate here. No wonder it can regulate reptilian instincts. The **neocortex** stirs us to the dawn of our humanity. Found in its initial stage in the primates like the chimpanzees, this

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution. How The Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World* (NY, NY: A Plume Book, 2007), 147.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

brain fully developed in the humans with two large cerebral lobes that we usually associate with the human brain. These lobes are associated with the development of language, abstract thinking, imagination, and consciousness. Its flexibility enables infinite learning abilities, leading to the development of human cultures. Called the rational brain as it is capable of intellectual tasks, it regulates reptilian instincts and human emotions.<sup>21</sup> The **prefrontal cortex**, sometimes called the executive brain, is the seat of decision-making, intentionality, and sense of purpose.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, it is also in this brain that transcendent thinking operates, including acts and behaviors that might not make sense from purely human criteria, like “dying for others.” These four parts of the brain do not operate independently of one another. They are so well interconnected that they easily influence one another. The neural pathways from the limbic system to the cortex, for instance, have well evolved.

Evolutionary psychology creates a moral system which follows the evolutionary development of the brain with their moral information along the way. Thanks to the reptilian brain of our ancestors and ours, we survive and multiply. But this can turn into a predator-prey, “dog-eats-dog,” territorial mentality. There is a way to put this in check. Thanks to the old mammalian brain, responsible and cooperative behavior regulates the reptilian instincts. But, this life of responsibility and cooperation for one’s own can turn into tribalism, that is, group survival (an improvement over mere individual survival) can make the group commit unjust aggression against another. The new mammalian brain can make long-term consideration that will enable all existing groups to cooperate in order to survive. This stage of the mind is a calculating mind (capable of cost-benefit analysis), which learns from the past and plans for the future, and can craft a code for distributive justice. Even in the midst of such fair and just society, where contributors are rewarded and the free riders punished, there

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<sup>21</sup> Pedro R. Barbosa, *Evolution, Ethics and Spirituality: Part VII – Moral Decisions (and Hiccups)*, accessed from <http://pmrb.net/blog/>.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Newberg, Eugene D’Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won’t Go Away. Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (NY, NY: Random House, 2002), 93.

is the human yearning for going beyond what justice seeks. Transcendent thinking is associated with sense of purpose, hope, love and service beyond the law, outside of the self, the family, and the group. From this hierarchical scheme is original sin explainable.

In every upward movement of the brain, the lower brain is surpassed but is still included by the higher brain. Finally, the brain transforms into one which seeks priorities in view of a higher purpose. When the lower brain lords it over the higher one, then we have the phenomenon of original sin, the cause for the Pauline enigma of doing what he is not supposed to and not doing what he is supposed to. For example, rape is following the reptilian brain's sexual instinct (good by itself) that is supposed to be regulated by the mammalian brain's responsible and sympathetic function. In the rape case, the latter (higher brain's regulatory task) is overpowered by the lower drive.

Original sin presumes original blessings of creation, a concept attributed to Matthew Fox, in his book, *Original Blessings, A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (1987). The original blessings are the benefits of each step of the evolution of the brain. Examples are: survival and sexual reproduction found in the reptilian brain, social bonding and calculating minds in the mammalian brain, sense of purpose in the prefrontal cortex, etc. Original sin is not a personal sin but the pulling down by the function of the lower brain and the mismatch of our mental equipment attuned to surviving, adapting, and reproducing in a bygone era but inadequate in a fast-paced present. Jesus' vision of a new inclusive world (kingdom of peace, justice, and love) transcends the limitations of each brain (territoriality, sex, survival ethics). The name "God" is given to "Wisdom of Nature" or "Greater Reality" or "Higher Purpose" that we inevitably conceive in evolutionary integrity.<sup>23</sup>

**POPULAR INCONGRUITIES IN HUMAN NATURE THAT  
ARE COMMONLY ATTRIBUTED TO "ORIGINAL SIN:"**

1. *Masarak ang bawal* (What is forbidden is sweet). It must be original sin. Why do we still crave for sugar and fatty foods

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<sup>23</sup> Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution*, 152-154.

when they are not good for the health? The evolutionary explanation is: our ancestors really need them due to hard work in a harsh environment. Knowing what we need today do not necessarily remove the want developed for millions of years.

2. In a monogamous culture, the male has still polygamous tendencies, it must be original sin. The evolutionary explanation is: The male species has the primordial need to spread the genes as much as possible for the perceived end of preserving the species due to many deaths. To populate the earth with humans is one way of assuring the survival of the human race. But our prolonging of life, attributed to science, has not removed the want to multiply more genes through more births, even if there is the danger of “population explosion.”
3. A family that has amassed so much wealth is still greedy and corrupt. It must be original sin. The evolutionary explanation is: To own vast territory was needed to go just beyond survival; there was a need to guarantee it at all cost. Territoriality which we usually observe among our domestic animals like dogs and cats, is seen among all other animals, including humans (think of “turking” among academics!).

The above explanations of original sin have been attributed to the secularists’ “optimistic understanding of human nature,” which causes alarm from evangelicals who claim, on the contrary, “that our human condition is universal and irredeemable, save for the gift of God’s grace.”<sup>24</sup> In my opinion, some kind of a consonance between the *Book of Nature* and the *Book of Scriptures* would be of help to bona-fide searchers of the Truth.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF THEOLOGY CRITICAL THINKING MODERATES**

In stating theology’s contribution to society, I would limit

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<sup>24</sup> Richard J. Coleman, “Saving Original Sin from the Secularists,” *Theology Today* 70 no. 4 (2013), 394-406.

myself to the role of science in doing theology with the hope that it is also applicable to the greater wellbeing of individuals and institutions. Theology most likely averts a literalistic and fundamentalistic approach to the Scriptures of any religion for that matter. We have read and heard of so many violent acts perpetrated in the name of a religion. Doing exegesis which is a step in doing theology reminds us of the literary genre, for example, metaphor. Between a metaphorical explanation and a literal one is a world of difference the knowledge of which can spell survival.

We learn in science the influence both of genes and environment; being aware of both gives us a self-knowledge that we need as we steer ourselves through life. Knowing our genetic past makes us assume an attitude of acceptance which is important for faith in Divine Providence. But in New Science, changes can be caused by the attitude of the person and his/her environment. So, in a religious faith that abets a fatalistic attitude, theology as an exercise of critical thinking and trending for a transformative thought can be an instrument of authentic and holistic changes in a society.

Doing theology from evolutionary psychology helps us peer deeply into human existence and discern the human condition. When we realize that people all over the world, in spite of their accidental differences like in religion, do essentially share a common humanity, and therefore can decide to live without doing harm to one another. In critical thinking brought about by theology, we are able to see the difference between form and substance, metaphor and fact, image and reality. In such critical and discriminating recognition of data, we will know where to agree and disagree; which ones are worth fighting for; and which ones are worth finding humor in.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **WHAT RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR CAN LEARN FROM THEOLOGY-SCIENCE CONSONANCE**

Science accepts its limitations in the very structure of science itself. It jibes with a theology that is more critical and uses secular disciplines to analyze Scriptural data. In the respective

acceptance of both science and theology, one does not take advantage of the weakness of the other. Theology does not serve as stopgap measure (*panakip butas*) where science seems deficient. Science acknowledges the nature of faith as beyond the empirical.

Science has gone past the mechanical model of reality in which everything is impersonal and measurable. The recent books even of atheistic scientists like Hawking and Dawkins effuse about the wonders of nature. Hawking authored a book with Leonard Mlodinov with the title, *The Grand Design* (2010). Dawkins wrote a book, *The Greatest Show on Earth, The Evidence of Evolution* (2009). It is a minus factor on their side to exclude a Creator and a Providence in their world, but they should be given credit for looking at cosmos and nature from an aesthetic eye. Their sense of wonder has not led them to a Divine Agent but it can be a jumping point for gratitude and worship in religious education and church liturgy.

In the phenomenon of healing, there is a preponderant evidence of prayer and active faith in the Church as correlated to healing. Of course, there is no clinical evidence of the cause-effect relationship of prayer and healing, but statistics have shown correlations. As I showed above, new physics and evolutionary psychology provide a new consonance that explains healing within nature itself with a religious activity like praying over and laying on of hands as channels or triggers of healing.

Complementarity of science and theology is good for both. In popular knowledge, we give to theology the task of answering the “why” questions and to science the “how.” There are no iron-clad distinctions. Evolutionists often find themselves asking the “why” questions when they venture into teleology or purposiveness. Theologians may ask the “how” questions when they are confronted with “boundary questions,” for instance, like the fine-tuning of the universe. They are called boundary questions because they are found at the boundary of scientific enquiry, and as such, according to Fraser Watts, “they call for a theological or metaphysical answer rather than a scientific one.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Fraser Watts, “Science and Theology as Complementary Perspectives,” in *Rethinking Theology and Science. Six Models for the Current Dialogue*, eds., Niels Henrik

Furthermore, in Dowd's thinking, doing theology, based on evolutionary integrity, that is, with respect for the hierarchy of the brains, is committed to "accountability and healthy feedback loops."<sup>26</sup> He continues:

Participants in these systems would review what was happening and notice consequences. Feedback loops would help us learn from our collective experience and detect early signs of success or failure. They would also help societies maintain balance where stability is needed and reinforce activity where breakthroughs are needed. Information and communication flows would be vast yet accessible.<sup>27</sup>

The theologian is aware of the past, appreciates and preserves its accumulated learning and contribution to knowledge. The theologian, however, is not stuck with the past, but ventures forth for new possibilities and novelties. After all, between the givens in the world and possibilities within, we need a faith that is receptive of the given and a faith that is committed to new possibilities. Theologians have their tasks cut out for them: that of the precursor and that of the escort. In the introduction we mentioned two unwitting theologians who exemplified the ultimate tasks of theology: to point to Christ as Lord and Savior like John the Baptizer did as precursor and to escort the expectant people to the same Lord and Savior like the Samaritan woman did.

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Gregersen and J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 174.

<sup>26</sup> Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution*, 232.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.